A NEW PLAYER HAS ENTERED THE GAME

The potential role of collegiate esports in the American university’s integration into the knowledge-based economy

Name: Ceciel Huiberts
Student Nr: s4502612
Email: c.huiberts@student.ru.nl
Advisor: Markha Valenta
Course: Bachelor Thesis American Studies
faculty of arts
Abstract
The electronic sports (esports) market is a growing global market that has peaked the interest of American higher education institutions. Though the debate about esports’ eligibility of being an actual sport is still ongoing, some brave American universities and students have embraced the possibility of esports in a collegiate setting, whether as a student run-organization or a varsity sport. The development of esports in a collegiate setting is a rapid one and without a proper map of the current status of the phenomenon much potential is, especially as a marketing tool for universities is lost. This thesis aims to explore the potential role of esports in the process of the reconfiguration and intergration of American public and non-profit institutions of higher education into the dominant knowledge-based economy. By employing an academic capitalist perspective and analysing the functions within higher education marketization that the collegiate American football programs and collegiate League of Legends programs (LoL) have developed due to their existence in the changing American society. By doing this, the current study examines wether the adoption of the new, young branch of sports called esports into the higher education athletics department is one that is logical and profitable from a marketing perspective. Does this young newcomer have what it takes to take the stage among the champions of the past?
Key words: esports, American football, League of Legends, collegiate athletics, academic capitalism
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Introduction

The traditional idea of an athlete usually brings to mind images of god-like, Greek heroes running at the speed of light, swinging around weights like they are made of styrofoam. In the American sports tradition we find a similar view of the all-American, male athlete with a muscular physique, running across the baseball pitch, football field or basketball court to score that game deciding point at the last second. It was this particular element of college life that fascinated me, an international student from the Netherlands, the most. The college athletics scene is an exceptionally American idea to me that could make or break the future of a student with the promise of a scholarship. It is an intricate part of the American society that has shaped the college experience and student identity for as long as it has existed. The scene I encountered at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, with the large Kenan memorial stadium and a student store filled with Tar Heel blue merchandise, showed me the intricate relationship an academic institution can have with its more corporate athletics department. It laid bare the commercial function collegiate athletics seem to fulfill in contemporary higher education in the United States.

However, the attention paid to the promotion of traditional varsity sports such as American football and basketball was a sharp contrast to the small booth for collegiate electronic sports (esports) that I encountered at the university’s Fallfest, an orientation market at the beginning of the fall semester. As a casual esports player I was aware of the enormous industry surrounding these particular sports and had trouble understanding the university’s choice to not include any esports as a varsity sport at the university. It is therefore that the recent adoption of esports into the collegiate athletics departments at several American universities peaked my interest. It was clear that universities were becoming more willing to let go of the vision of muscles, sweat and determination of traditional sports in order to embrace the image of the gamer that wanted to be recognized as an athlete in a field ruled by basketball and football prodigies. This led me to wonder what factors contributed to this new interest in varsity esports.

Even though esports have been taking the world by storm for about a decade now (Seo, 2013), competitive gaming had been a trend since the first arcade games were released. It was the competitive online aspect of gaming that opened new doors for bigger competitions that could be hosted worldwide as the match took place in a virtual space. This relatively new form of esports, introduced in the early 2000s, has been the subject of various recent studies. Most of these studies
(Jenny et al., 2017; Jonasson & Thiborg, 2010) are concerned with the question of whether esports should even be considered a sport or focus on the marketing dimensions and consumer behavior related to esports in general (Pizzo et al., 2017). Only a small number of studies has focussed on esports in a collegiate setting and even less discourse has mentioned the potential benefits esports might hold for universities. As many universities had already decided to invest in varsity esports and the United States government had already started to grant athlete visas to esports athletes, the question whether esports should be considered sports seemed to become less and less relevant under the current developments, while the appeal of esports to universities seemed to become a more relevant and more pressing question. Especially in an academic environment that according to various scholars, has become increasingly preoccupied with the capitalist dimension and relationships of academics within the contemporary knowledge-based economy (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). This meant that a vital part of research regarding this new development in the reconfiguration of the function and identity of college athletics and therefor higher education in American society was underrepresented in the available discourse. It is because of this reason that the current research was led to focus on the following main question: to what extend does the introduction of esports in collegiate athletics benefit American public and non-profit universities’ integration in the contemporary knowledge-based economy?

The current study will attempt to answer this question in several steps. In the first chapter, a literary review of the available discourse regarding the development of American public and non-profit universities in the last few decades will be conducted. Here the theoretical framework, based on the ideas of academic capitalism will form the bases for a further analysis of the collegiate sports phenomenon in the next chapter. The second chapter will provide a small, casestudy-based analysis of the functions of collegiate athletics, American football in particular, and will try to isolate the different factors that make traditional college sports an appealing investment for many universities. The resulting elements of collegiate athletics’ appeal will then provide a model for the analysis of a casestudy of League of Legends (LoL), one of the esport games with the most players and viewers in the world (Paul, 2017), in chapter 3 of this thesis. In the end, this last case study, resulting from a small comparative analysis of traditional sports and esports in collegiate setting, will provide us with an answer to the question whether the current trend of introducing esports into the university setting is a worthwhile and logical next step in the evolution of American higher education.
1. Theory and methodology

In order to examine the role of esports in higher education it is crucial to delve into the history and development of the American higher education system as we know it and identify the underlying motives and systems that shape contemporary education.

Various multidisciplinary studies of higher education have developed since the 1990s and many different frameworks (like the ‘triple helix’ and ‘mode 2 knowledge production’) have been used to a clearer overview of the shifting relations between higher education, the private sector and the state throughout the years. The current study will look at the evolution of higher education, specifically public and non-profit universities, from a ‘academic capitalism’ perspective, a political economic perspective which is grounded in the theory of neoliberalism and knowledge-based economy (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

1.1 Knowledge-based economy

There are many different purposes one can attribute to universities, purposes that have evolved throughout the ages based on economic, political and social influences. One of the dominant university missions that has been mentioned increasingly more often in the past three decade is higher education’s task to educate “knowledge workers” and utilize its research capacities to profit from the economic demand for information technology (Crawford, 2010). This idea the university as a contributor to the American economy is the result of the economy’s change towards “post-industrial” and “knowledge-based” (Bell, 1973; Castells, 1993).

The idea of this “knowledge-based” economy (KBE) was first mentioned and predicted by Daniel Bell in his book The Coming of Post-Industrial Society. He predicted an increased interest in the acquiring of knowledge instead of capital and an increased importance of universities in the production process (Bell, 1973). The ideas he posited were further developed by Castells in 1993, who set apart several features that were vital to his so-called “informational economy”. He believed that the factor of knowledge had always been vital to the production process, but the process was dictated by the pace in which knowledge was created and applied, with knowledge of technology and science being the most influential forms (Castells, 1993). In addition, he stated that the demand for an unskilled, cheap and massive labour force was slowly replaced by demand for a smaller, skilled labour force with specific knowledge certain areas of production, complemented by a
flexible smaller, less-skilled labour force (Castells, 1993; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). This new labour force was accompanied by a changing organizational network that focussed on non-standardized production instead of the Fordist assembly line production. The KBE also demanded a more global, transnational, border-crossing view of a global economy and network of knowledge sharing and trading. Castells finished by stating that these changes had been heavily dependent on technological changes, in particular the evolution of telecommunications (Castells, 1993).

The fact that the KBE has influenced university decision making in the past decades has been clear (Jessop, 2008) and thus it will provide the context for the market opportunities and challenges of contemporary universities in the current research.

1.2 Neoliberalism

The actions and opportunities within the KBE context for knowledge producers such as universities has been emphasized by the concept of neoliberalism. The concept of neoliberalism is based on the idea of free markets, free trade, individual freedom of entrepreneurship and strong private property rights (Ong, 2006; Harvey, 2005). The neoliberal state also aims to reduce the power of the government as the welfare state supposedly functions in a less efficient way due to bureaucratic processes (Morrow, 2006). Natural competition and individual freedom are important factors that create opportunity and innovation in the neoliberal state, creating a decentralization of government powers, but still dependent on government to encourage its participants to function within market-principles it has set up (Ong, 2006).

In higher education, neoliberal theory is important to explain the consequences of intervention by the government. Interventions that are often the result of market failures in higher education and consist of subsidies for students or institutions (Paulsen, 2001). In time, the gradual cutting of funding for universities has led to an increased reliance on the free market mechanisms and thus increased the process of 'marketization', or participation in the market, of public institutions (Paulsen, 2001). It displayed the idea of the university as an enterprise.

1.3 Academic capitalism

The theory of academic capitalism attempts to provide an overview of the networks, participants and events that created and maintained a shift in American higher education from a “public good regime” to the neoliberalism-based “academic capitalism regime” (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The model of academic capitalism thus attempts to show the modes of
survival and integration of the former “public good” institutions into the contemporary KBE, thereby blurring the boundaries between public good and the market (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997).

According to many scholars the shift was initiated around the 1970s by changes in the political-economic context of higher education institutions (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Two major changes were particularly important in this process. The first being the national efforts to find an alternative technological and scientific system after the fall of Fordist manufacturing and the economic competition the United States had to face, which was part of the development of the KBE. The second change was the gradual shift towards neoliberal policies by the Reagan administration. The effects of these changes were more profoundly noticed in the public and non-profit institutions, which will therefore be the subject in the current research.

For public universities the changes meant that private interest became more important than public demands, meaning that students were more concerned with getting individual returns on their investments. This development, in addition to funding cuts caused universities to get involved in competition over national and international student enrollment, private funding and researcher attendance (Bok 2003, Slaughter & Rhoades 2004). The strategic priorities of public institutions changed. As the corporations in the KBE started demanding more knowledge workers in specific fields and research that could be applied to economic processes in exchange for funding, the pressure for universities to attract certain students and professionals and to gain more funding for their research increased even more.

The theory of academic capitalism should not be seen as dominant and necessarily true in all circumstances. According to Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) alternative processes of integration can be developed in various situations and can be resisted as well. Pusser also contends that not all outcomes of contemporary education reform and integration necessarily oppose the public good. The development of citizenship, the stimulation of economic growth and the diffusion of technology might contribute to the goals of both the “academic capitalism regime” as well as the “public good regime” (Pusser 2002). However, Pusser does admit that the tipping balance of the system towards private funding and personal responsibility are showing an overall trend in favor of strategies and activities that follow the “academic capitalism regime” (Pusser 2002).

Slaughter and Rhoades have summarized the various factors that influence decision-making at the public and non-profit institutions by setting apart the different strategies and activities the institutions adopt and undertake in order successfully survive in the contemporary economy. For example, they found that the ‘academic capitalism regime’ only leads to a short-term market focus
in academic programming, a trend that leads to the underrepresentation of marginalized groups, as they do not have enough potential to contribute to the KBE. In addition, they point towards the trend of neglecting teaching as faculty rewards, an action that leads to the increased recognition of research and revenue-generating activities of faculty and a faculty mindset that views course instruction as less important. Rhoades and Slaughter do mention that there is an increased interest in the instruction of courses in economic relevant fields of study, leading towards a less broad choice of courses in universities. This development is slightly halted by the pressure to appeal to potential students, who, in the ‘academic capitalist regime’, are seen as self-interested consumers to whom a university should appeal in order to get more funding. The institution therefor becomes a marketeer and moves farther away state funding and influence and closer to the influence of market principles. Education at a university, according to Slaughter and Rhoades, is transformed into and marketed as a lifestyle and the university brand is becoming increasingly better protected by university staff. They also argue that the shift towards the ‘academic capitalist regime’ is a two-sided development with both outside economic, social and political influences determining what kind of strategies should be adopted, as well as the institutions’ desire to stay involved in the new regime as soon as they extended their managerial workforce to enforce the strategies to maximize integration. Furthermore, it is important to note that the institutions adhering to the ‘academic capitalist regime’ do not wish to become ‘corporatized’ as their tax-exempt status is an important part of the integration and revenue-generating strategies.

The theory of academic capitalism, as envisioned by the original theorists Sheila Slaughter, Larry Leslie, and Gary Rhoades, examines the different strategies and actions that public and non-profit higher education institutions employ in order to integrate and survive in the KBE. By setting apart the different actors, new networks and strategies for knowledge creation, sharing and protection we can apply the theory to new situations and events that have a potential place at the institutions.

1.3.1 Academic capitalism and internationalization

An important sub-dimension of the ‘academic capitalism regime’ is that of the global knowledge sharing circuits. The internationalization was only briefly touched upon by Slaughter, Rhoades and Leslie and further examined by Ilka Kauppinen and other scholars. Internationalization has become an increasingly integral part of in the development of institutional strategies and goals in United States higher education (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). ‘Marketization’ is seen as a key motivation for the development of internationalization (Beck 2009). This is the case because transnational knowledge sharing holds the promise of more diverse sources of revenue,
which can be used to further both international and nation integration into the KBE (Beck 2009). The desire to acquire more international funding, in the form of tuition or research grants, has led to the creation of recruitment offices and programs in many countries.

The concept of ‘transnational academic capitalism’ does not imply that national academic capitalism has become entirely transnational. Both regimes coexist, with the transnational regime providing more opportunity to diversify the sources of external funding as well as gain prestige that could provide an edge when applied as a marketing tool. This practice must be seen as an addition to the concept of ‘academic capitalism’ not a mere transnational replacement, as the development of strategies and practices in ‘transnational academic capitalism’ are not proportional in all countries an institutions in the world (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). This is the result of the competition on a transnational level.

In short, the concept of ‘transnational academic capitalism’ extends the array of opportunities for institutions to acquire different forms of capital in addition to the nationally acquired funds. Funds are acquired in different manners ranging from attracting international students to selling patents in an international context. Once again showing how knowledge networks are evolving and expanding constantly, increasingly blurring the lines between the private and public sectors in both national and international context.

1.4 Academic capitalism and collegiate athletics

Slaughter, Rhoades and Leslie have also briefly touched upon the specific opportunities that collegiate athletics might hold for public and non-profit institutions. They emphasize its function as display for the university brand and booster of community feeling. They state that the most external funding originates from merchandising and sponsor contract by big corporations such as Nike and Adidas. Both these companies and the institutions themselves see the students as consumers to whom they sell a lifestyle, in the form of merchandise such as ‘athleisure wear’ (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). These students are part of the so-called captive market and are therefor easy to target with university branded merchandise. It comes as no surprise that many corporations therefor engage in all-sports contract deals which let the corporations endorse an entire university, instead of a specific coach or team. They sell an identity. This ensures that every student who want to participate in the university culture can be reached, not just the fans of a particular team or sport. These corporations thus benefit from a strong community feeling and culture. In this process, universities are very much concerned with getting the most out of their deal, reducing
university responsibility and providing proper protection for their identity. The branded society characteristic of the KBE has, in this way, reconfigured the experience of collegiate athletics.

Though universities are willing to sell their identities, retail space on campus and influence on the athlete selection to external parties, they are often still suffering a loss when comparing the revenue and costs of the athletics department. This is an exceptional practice when considering the context of the ‘academic capitalist regime’, as the acquisition of funds and the investment of these funds in market-like and market behavior is an important dynamic of the regime.

It is because of this reason that we must also look further at other functions of collegiate athletics besides the attraction of sponsors. One function that is often overlooked as a source of revenue is the role of national prestige that comes with collegiate athletic success. It is because of the popularity of collegiate sports and the prominence that comes with athletic success, that some universities remain in a certain football conference, even though they gain virtually no financial benefit from it. It is because of the association with the other conference universities that many institutions believe that the loss of funds is worth the renown and potential new applications that will eventually bring in more tuition funds and new candidates to educate as “knowledge workers”. Here, the international element of the ‘academic capitalist regime’ also become a relevant part of the institution’s strategy. The renown of certain universities and university sports teams, for example the Ivy League schools, can attract foreign students who will pay more tuition. Athletic success can also improve campus culture, as many students gather en and enjoy important sports games, like the traditional basketball game between the university of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and their rival university Duke.

Charles Clotfelter, a collegiate athletics expert form Duke university, also examined the purpose of collegiate sports in American universities from an economic perspective. In his book Big-Time Sports in American Universities he describes the intricate relationship between the academic mission of an institution and the value of big-time sports. To do this he sets apart four purposes that traditional sports have come to serve for today’s higher education institutions. These four purposes are: big-time athletics as a consumer good, as an enterprise, as an institution builder and as beacon for campus culture (Clotfelter, 2011). As Clotfelter focusses on the functions of ‘big-time’ sports, because of its ideal position as a bridge between the public and private sections of the economy, the current research will also be limited to this particular sports department. Clotfelter’s categories largely match up with the functions of collegiate athletics as examined from an ‘academic capitalist’ perspective and can easy be explored with the ‘academic capitalist’ theory.
In the end, a combination of research by Leslie, Slaughter and Rhoades on the university’s strategies and decisions for maintaining and transforming the collegiate athletics department and Clotfelter’s clearly divided categories outlining the different purposes of big-time collegiate athletics, will provide the current study with a basic model of characteristics that and theory that should help with the identification of the opportunities and challenges of traditional, big-time collegiate athletics as a tool for integration in the KBE.

1.5 Methodology and justification

The literary review of sources on the development of ‘academic capitalism’ within higher education as shown above laid bare the underlying principles and motives for different institutional practices and strategies that we can observe on the contemporary American public university campus. By combining the insights of ‘academic capitalist’ theory and applying them to the four categories that Clotfelter discussed in his book I will provide a short analysis of a case study on the appeal of traditional collegiate sports, specifically American football.

American football will be the main subject of this case study as Clotfelter’s theory was originally written with ‘big-time’ collegiate athletics in mind. In addition, American football is by far the most popular collegiate sport and has historically developed as a sport that is organized more by the universities themselves instead of other governing bodies. This makes American football the ideal case study to explore the direct relationship between the private and public spheres without too much interference of other controlling parties. This also makes American football more similar to collegiate esports, which have not been fully institutionalized yet and are thus more in control of the institutions themselves.

After the analysis of how the functions and appeal of American football from an ‘academic capitalist’ perspective, a similar case study of the relatively young phenomenon of collegiate esports, specifically the League of Legends (LoL) branch will be conducted to examine the possible similarities and differences between the appeal and motives between adopting esports and traditional sports in a public university setting in the contemporary economy. The Clotfelter categories of collegiate athletics functions will also provide the base for this case study in order to be able to compare the analyses.

The esports case study is focussed on LoL as it is one of the most popular games in the world, has been around longer than most other popular games, has been adopted by many early adopter universities like Robert Morris University, the first university with a varsity esports team,
and has been one of the esports branches with more standardized tournaments and recurring competitions.

Through the use of these two small, comparative case studies, the current research hopes to lay bare the first small similarities and differences between the two very different, but immensely popular forms of athleticism in higher education setting. To find a possible explanation for the current boom in adoption of esports in athletics departments and to explore the potential changes the adoption of esports might bring to the university campus.
2. The purpose and appeal of collegiate athletics

2.1 The origins of traditional sports

Sports have been an important part of the college tradition in the United States for decades, however colleges have not always embraced the tradition in the way we see them do nowadays. Where many of today’s college campuses have a stadium of some sorts, colleges before 1850 showed no sign of any athletic involvement (Powers, 2018). The early colleges of North-Eastern colonial America had a clear relationship with the American-English society in the way that they were private universities, run by a board of trustees, preoccupied with shaping young minds to become aristocratic and religious leaders (Flowers, 2009). The system was built to serve the individuals who enrolled in the private institutions and therefor favored a regime of strategies and practices that very much resembled laissez-faire, free market, individualistic idea of the ‘academic capitalist regime’. However, in this system, there was a clear lack of physical education (Dalleck & Kravitz, 2001). Nonetheless, many students, rising against the will of school officials, participated in some form of intramural sports, a custom that had started in the British colleges in the Old country. Sports such as football, bandy (a form of field hockey), and baseball-like sports, provided students with an escape from the monotonous and highly disciplined, academic culture (Flowers, 2009).

The first colleges’ adherence to the will of the board of trustees became apparent in the way they all dealt with the upcoming popularity of student-organized sports. The first college sports were organized and governed by students themselves. In this time students were divided in classes who harbored a strong rivalry with each other. This class bond gave birth to the concept of “class rushes” (Marszalek, 1990). These very rowdy and sometimes violent student-organized intramural competitions were one of the ways in which students showed their class loyalty and rebelled against the paternalism of the early colonial American colleges (Marszalek, 1990). These very rowdy and sometimes violent student-organized intramural competitions were one of the ways in which students showed their class loyalty and rebelled against the paternalism of the early colonial American colleges (Marszalek, 1990), a part of their identity as free individuals who longed for some kind of control over their own curriculum, but it also showed the first signs of collegiate community spirit. Some college officials thought of these competitions as problematic, as they constituted a distraction from scholarly work and the process of playing sports did not align with
the academic mission of many institutions (Flowers, 2009). Therefore, many officials banned certain sports activities, such as Princeton which forbade bandy for being “low and unbecoming gentlemen and scholars” (Flowers, 2009). Other colleges merely disagreed with the fact that intramural sports took place and paid no attention to it. This, laissez-faire attitude of certain private institutions, towards the phenomenon made it possible that, during the first part of the 19th century, the governing of such competitions was in the hands of student-run organizations like fraternities and literary societies (Marszalek, 1990). The private university’s independence from American society and freedom to deal with economic pressures has thus granted collegiate athletics the first freedoms to develop as a part of student life.

After the Second Great Awakening the development of most casual intramural competitions was stinted by the mingling of school officials (Flowers, 2009). The principal of “Muscular Christianity”, the training of both mind and body, came to dominate most religious private institutions (Flowers, 2009, p. 3). In addition to the acceptance of athleticism by school administrators, curriculums started to change, providing students with electives and the opportunity to meet students outside of their own year and class. Social and political changes in American society had now reconfigured the vision of education. The need for rebellion started to disappear as students gained more freedom to shape their class schedule and class loyalty slowly became a thing of the past (Flowers, 2009).

Private universities started to gradually replace the intramural sports with a newly developing intercollegiate competition, a movement that was initially started by students themselves (Smith, 2015). In an attempt to mimic the rivalry between Oxford and Cambridge, Yale and Harvard started the first private college rivalry in the United States. Their first competition, a boating race, was held in 1844 (Flowers, 2009; Igel & Boland 2011). The event drew a significant number of spectators and it was funded with the help of a railroad superintendent who paid for transport, a major hurdle for other intercollegiate competitions, and other expenses (Flowers, 2009). After this competitions other intercollegiate games emerged quickly, with baseball following in 1859 (Flowers, 2009) and football in 1869 (Branch, 2011). The first transactions between college athletics and external private organizations had taken place, showing the possibilities of external funding for higher education institutions.

Collegiate athletics would not get its full recognition as part of student life and the college experience in American society until alumni started to gain more influence in the development of phenomenon (Flowers, 2009). The need for external funding in order to organise competitions and buy equipment caused students to call upon alumni (Sack, 1991). The athletic dimension of student
life was very much integrated into the economy as alumni provided funding, external coaches were hired and professionals were asked to join student teams. They were even more integrated at that point in time than the higher education institutions themselves and with this realization the question of commercialization and amateurism became more relevant.

With the boom of public universities after the 1860s, due to the introduction of Merrill Land Grand College Act of 1862, intercollegiate competition spread from the North eastern states to the rest of the United States (Flowers, 2009; R. A. Smith 2011a). During the 19th century, faculty and school officials had noticed the rapid growth in interest of collegiate athletics among new students, and though the extracurricular activities seemed to interfere with normal academic obligation, the amount of new applications due to athletic success were incentive enough to maintain the activities (Gregory 2013). In the late 19th century, both private and public universities, the latter being much less closely dependent on government demands than one might think, set up “faculty athletic committees” in order to regain control over their students (R.A. Smith, 2011a). These committees established rules pertaining to an athletes permitted absences in class or the specific amount of games a team could play, these were often limited to the weekend (R.A. Smith, 2011a). Many faculties tried to gain control over the way coaches were selected and attempted to protect their teams from professionalism. Students’ grip on college athletics was slipping as it became an integrated part of the institution.

The power struggle between, students, faculty and alumni greatly influenced the evolution of athletics as a part of the collegiate experience as power dynamics shifted. After Harvard tried to ban football due to its “ungentlemanly” nature (R.A. Smith 2011a, p. 21), the unrest on campus led the institutions to create a sport committee consisting of students, alumni and faculty members. It was due to this system that saved the existence of the sport.

The shift from the religious system towards a more capitalist, post-colonial American society also left its marks on the history of collegiate sports, showing once again how intricately related universities and societies are. In the late 19th century wealth, power and recognition were the main factors that took control of America’s oldest educational institutions and collegiate sports seemed to be a perfect marketing tool (Flowers, 2009). Student control wavered as faculty and alumni fought to get the upper hand in the struggle for power over collegiate sports. The investment in sports escalated as Harvard constructed the first ever college stadium in 1904, creating a permanent column of athletics on their academic campus. Many others followed within the next two decades. An underground economy within college athletics emerged. College officials felt the need to lower academic demands and provide perks for athletes in order to keep them away from the
competition (Flowers, 2009). Still, even with all these issues college athletics became a beacon of student loyalty. It was like President William Howard Taft wrote, “The feeling of solidarity and loyalty in the student body that intercollegiate contests develop is a good thing; it outlasts every contest and it continues in the heart and soul of every graduate as long as he lives” (Flowers 2009, p. 9). Athletes had become the true representatives of their colleges and home states and alumni had become their first official sponsors. College sports were steadily commercializing and here to stay.

The power over collegiate athletic program configuration shifted once again as the different university committees could not reach a consensus about how the athletics department should be arranged, with professionalization and budget differences being the biggest problems (R.A. Smith, 2011a). After a 1905 intercollegiate football season that resulted in 18 deaths and over 100 major injuries (Igel & Boland 2011), a governmental Intercollegiate Athletics Association (IAA), formed by Theodore Roosevelt and 13 prominent colleges, took over the control from the increasingly ‘marketized’ and independent universities. In the 1920s the IAA was reconfigured to become the National College Athletics Association (NCAA) (R. Smith, 2000).

The government influence on higher education in public institutions and the collegiate athletics department continued to thrive after this development with the introduction of several legislative changes like the introduction of the GI Bill, or the The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944. With the passing of this act college enrollment skyrocketed (Igel & Boland 2011). With this increase in admissions the audience for college athletics also grew explosively. Higher education had become a part of the American dream, with college athletics also playing a prominent role.

In just a short period of time college athletics has become a major part of the United States college experience. An integral part of the system that has evolved from a student rebellion to an enterprise on its own, run by college administrators, adapting to changes in the social, political and economic environment of American society. A tool for student body bonding, marketing, and creating revenue, the power of college athletics goes beyond what we see on the court, pitch or field. The games are just the tip of the iceberg.

2.2 Revisionism under the NCAA

Revisionism of the collegiate athletics department is an important indication of underlying power-struggles and socio-political influences that shape the public and non-profit collegiate sports experience. The establishment of the NCAA has been the primary shaper of the collegiate sports
tradition as we see it at universities today. It helped create the intricate web of athletic departments, leagues and conferences, but also still lays bare where problems in organization and legislation of sports still occur. Though there are multiple governing bodies for collegiate athletics in the US, such as National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), with athletes on the same level as NCAA division II and National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), the most renowned and powerful one is and remains the NCAA, therefore I will focus on reform dictated by this organization in the current research.

Before the NCAA was called into existence the realm of college athletics was haunted problems of violence, creative cheating and disagreement. Faculties ruled the domain of college athletics and had now gained full control (R.A. Smith, 2011a). The benefits of having a successful athletics department and the power of collegiate athletics as a marketing tool were very enticing to many institutions (Gregory, 2013, p. 38). Within a decade of its conception, the NCAA was accused of promoting commercialism. The Carnegie Foundation released a report in 1929, acknowledging the popularity of college athletics, while laying bare issues of over-commercialization, academic fraud, gambling, cheating and concerns for athlete welfare (Igel & Boland 2011).

As a reaction to the criticism and the Carnegie Foundation’s report, the NCAA created a so-called “Sanity Code” in 1948 (R.A. Smith, 2011a). With this Sanity Code, the organization stated rules regarding the course member colleges should take with their athletics department. The code included several moralizing rules like the prohibition of concealed and indirect benefits for college athletes, who were supposed to play the games for the benefit of playing (R. Smith, 2000; Branch, 2011). To enforce the code the NCAA established a Constitutional Compliance Committee. However, the only measure the committee could take was the expulsion from the NCAA membership, making the committee powerless (Branch, 2011). The organization’s lack of power, caused many college in the same states and regions to form conferences and leagues, these assured that colleges in that region, where the same state laws applied, could at least compete with colleges with the same legal limitations (R.A. Smith, 2011a).

The NCAA gained more power over colleges in the second half of the 20th century, slowly reforming college athletics towards a fairer future for all members. The Constitutional Compliance Committee was replaced by the Committee on Infraction in 1951. In the same year, the NCAA abolished its Sanity Code (Sack, 1991). The NCAA realized that it needed financial resources to properly enforce its authority. It was then, in 1951, that the organization outlawed televised competitions except for a few that were licensed by the NCAA itself (Branch, 2011). This monopoly eventually made it possible to sign contract with broadcasting companies, providing the
NCAA with the funds it had been lacking (R. Smith, 2000; Branch, 2011). Television revenue earned the organization 5.1 million dollars in 1962 (R. Smith, 2000; Branch, 2011). The more popular teams and players, with a higher skill level felt reluctant to share their television revenues with the less popular teams (Igel & Boland 2011). As a result, in 1973, the NCAA restructured its programs, creating the well-known division I, II and III programs we still see today. With the division I schools being the best-funded programs, followed by the division II and eventually division III programs. After half a century, the NCAA finally took on the role of referee that it had supposed to be since it was founded in 1905. It was with this reform that the NCAA determined the market-value and potential of the different colleges, propelling them into the entertainment sector with the influence of television rights opening up new opportunities for 'marketization' of the athletics department.

The reform continued in the last two decades of the 20th century, creating an intricate structure of athletic programs. In the 1990s, division I university football programs were subdivided into three subdivisions: I, I-A and I-AA. I-A and I-AA were renamed "Football Bowl Subdivision" (FBS) and "Football Championship Subdivision" (FCS), respectively (R.A. Smith, 2011a). These subdivisions determine the amount of scholarship aid a university can grant to a specific amount of players. The conferences and leagues that were formed prior to the creation of the NCAA’s Committee on Infraction largely remain intact as many football teams play the regular season games in intra-conference setting, only to move on to the post-season knock-out games after they come out as victor of their particular conference or league.

In the 1980s the government deregulated the cable tv industry, escalating television revenue and demand for content (Zola, 2013). As the NCAA still controlled the broadcasting rights to many collegiate competitions, the University of Georgia and the University of Oklahoma challenged them in order to regain control over the televising of collegiate football. It was ruled that the control of football television rights by the organization violated the Sherman Antitrust Act (NCAA v. Board of Regents, 1984). This ruling broke the NCAA control over college football and led to the establishing of the College Football Association, a group formed by top-level football programs to negotiate television rights together (R.A. Smith, 2011a). Since then the NCAA has been almost entirely dependent on Basketball broadcast revenues (Igel & Boland 2011).

In addition to providing structure and regulation for colleges in the college sports tradition, the NCAA has walked the line providing rules to protect the integrity of the educative mission of college athletics, as well as provide student athletes with proper compensation. The first official
scholarships were approved by the NCAA in 1957 (King, 2012). The length of the scholarship was the full four years of college-time, which was later changed to a renewable one year scholarship which had to be renewed under approval of a coach (King, 2012). The power over college athletics, and with that the power over a significant amount of revenue, colleges’ reputation and the young athletes’ opportunity to continue to study, was now almost entirely in the hands of the coaches (King, 2012).

Today, the NCAA, though it has provided much structure and regulation in the college athletics tradition, is still under fire when it comes to many issues in the dynamic and always developing world of college sports. In the same ruling as NCAA v. Board of Regents it was made clear by the high court that the NCAA is the true guardian of the American tradition of amateurism in intercollegiate athletics (Zola, 2013). The court also stated that, “In order to preserve the character and quality of the ‘product,’ athletes must not be paid, must be required to attend class, and the like (Monks, 2013, p. 6). This would prove to be a much contested practice.

It is important to realize that through revisionism by the NCAA and the contesting of said revisionism, collegiate athletics have become the marketing tool it is today. The economic rewards, the place of collegiate sports as a form of national entertainment and thus as a beacon of community spirit and prestige, as well as the power of the attraction of new student have been the result of actions surrounding the revisionism of the early collegiate tradition. The influence of social, political and economic shifts is clear and the interaction between private and public sphere has increased, causing external parties to have more influence on the athletics department and universities to become more embedded within the KBE.

2.3 Collegiate American football
American football has probably undergone the most changes of any sport in the American collegiate sports tradition and is also the most popular of college sports (National Football Foundation, 2018). These changes have cause college football to be more in control colleges and universities themselves more than any other division I sport in the US.

Traditionally, the sport of football was similar to what Americans now call soccer. The original soccer-like football was played during the first intercollegiate football match between Rutgers and Princeton in 1869. However, due to Harvard’s reluctance to participate in the soccer-like matches. The game was changed to a more rugby-inspired game. Harvard’s prestige in the old
college sports leagues in the North east caused Yale and other colleges to follow the trend and soccer-like football was slowly replaced (R.A. Smith, 2011a).

The attitude towards American football has not always been as favorable as nowadays. Much like other developing collegiate sports, Football did not match the academic mission of many institutions. The rugby-like game was popularized by Harvard, it was used as a hazing technique, employed on a day called bloody Monday, as excuse for sophomores to use excessive violence towards freshmen (Marszalek, 1990). Because of this school administrators were still wary of adopting the sport even after Harvard endorsed it. President D. White of Cornell once said: "I will not permit thirty men to travel four hundred miles merely to agitate a bag of wind" (Rudolph, 1962 p. 374–375), indicating the hostile attitude towards the game that many colleges adopted at the time in 1873.

Football was further Americanized when the student-run Intercollegiate Football Association ratified the rugby rules in 1876 (R.A. Smith, 2011a). A meeting held between different eastern universities in that year brought more structure to a game. It would be known as football only because of the first rules which pertained to kicking (Nelson, 1995). The rest of the rules were a modified set of rugby rules. In 1877, Walter Camp, a Yale student who is also known as “the father of Football”, joined the Intercollegiate Football Association’s Rules Committee and became one of the most important innovators of the game. Camp introduced the eleven-player rule, the dimensions of the field, the rule that only allows three attempts to gain five yards and the scoring system (Nelson, 1995). Within 15 years, Camp almost singlehandedly changes a game of brutal and uncoordinated violence into a technical and precise sport.

American football games drew big audiences and with the developments of new technologies tournament organizers and spectators were eager to see how far they could take the football spectacle. The football frenzy started with the first Thanksgiving Day Football Game, a game planned by Princeton, Harvard, Yale and Columbia in 1876, which drew a crowd of 23.000 spectators (R.A. Smith, 2001b). In 1893 the number of spectators had risen to more than 40.000 and many members of the media stood at a ready to report the exhilarating game to the readers of their newspapers (R.A. Smith, 2001b). Most of the revenue generated with these early games came from the selling of tickets and box seats to the wealthy New York City inhabitants who were eager to watch. The number of spectator revenue, sponsorships and merchandising revenue would only rise further after the introduction of radio and television in the 1920s.

Even though football had developed into a much more tactical game by the 1900s, the establishment of the NCAA saved and changed the game of football for the remainder of its
existence. By 1902 the first Bowl game, the Rose bowl, had been set up and football was still gaining popularity (R.A. Smith, 2001b). However, after the NCAA was formed (R.A. Smith, 2001b) Walter Camp and President Theodore Roosevelt saved the game of football from being banned, but changed it even further (R.A. Smith, 2001b). In the second half of the 1900s the NCAA provided national rules for the payment and selection of athletes, the role of the media, the safety of the game and the structure of athletic programs in the United States.

After the boom in popularity due to television and radio in the 1920s universities and colleges increasingly played into the commercial success of the sport. From 1902 on many stadiums were built, funded by alumni money, in order to accommodate the massive amount of spectators that came to see the American football games. The game of football proved to be a great way to add masculinity and virility to the somewhat stuffy academic character of many colleges (Borish, 2017). Many universities and colleges with successful sports programs also had the most academic success and therefore, educational institutions felt the need for self-promotion (Borish, 2017). In addition to being a great marketing tool, college sports are also a form of revenue generation. The tax-exempt rule, saying that as long as college sports remain amateur they maintain a tax-exempt status, is very important in the survival of athletic departments throughout the US. Often the football revenue is enough to pay for other athletic branches at a university. These realizations on the part of colleges and universities led to an increased pressure to put out a winning team. Feeling the pressure to perform, many coaches started breaking rules, leading to increased pressure on student athletes. The divide between the academic and athletic missions of colleges and universities seemed to widen.

By the twenty-first century the NCAA lost most of its real control over collegiate football. Even with its 131 Divisions I-FBS school members, the 10 FBS conferences, American Athletic Conference, Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference, Big 12 Conference, Conference USA (C-USA), Mid-American Conference (MAC), Mountain West Conference (MWC), Pac-12 Conference, Southeastern Conference (SEC) and Sun Belt Conference, largely determine things by themselves (R.A. Smith, 2001b). Many football conferences and leagues started negotiating their own rights and margins of revenue and creating their own revenue sharing models. The entire post season selection system, formerly Bowl Championship Series (BCS) system, that was used in collegiate football from 1998 until 2013, and the new College Football Playoff (CFP) system, showcase the power of the power five conferences. Even though the CFP system was put into place in order to preserve the excitement of the regular football season and make people focus less on the championship game only, the control of the conferences is noticeable (“FAQS”. 2018). In 2014, the power of the five conferences was enforced yet again when the NCAA determined that
the power five conferences could discuss and act on certain issues in college football autonomously (Solomon, 2016). The veil of the illusion of NCAA governance over college football seems to grow thinner and thinner.

Today, collegiate American football is still a sport that remains under development. There are still instances where the brutality of the sport is questioned (The Associated Press, 2018), where the NCAA is called out for being a “cartel” (Pagels, 2017) and the commercialization of the sport is seen as a danger to the academic mission (Green, 2015). The wave of commercialization and professionalism that started with the elite eastern college such as Harvard and Yale has spread rapidly throughout the US in the last two centuries. Collegiate football is at the top of this pyramid, dealing with the most revenue (Gaines, 2017), the biggest spectator numbers (2017 NCAA Men’s Basketball Attendance, 2017; 2017 National College Football Attendance, 2017) and the most media attention.

2.4 Collegiate American football in academic capitalist context

2.4.1 Collegiate American football as a consumer good

Charles Clotfelter (2011) examines how the effect of collegiate sports as a consumer good influences the success of a university. In order to do this, Clotfelter dives into the entertainment value of collegiate athletics and describes the effect of merchandising, ticket sales and the spectator culture surrounding collegiate athletics (Clotfelter, 2011). Clotfelter seems to be surprised by the existing demand for collegiate sports and blames the existence of such a demand on the long history traditional sports have in American society. As sports were one of the earliest forms of entertainment, the interest people show in them today might be a remainder of this early practice of watching sports for entertainment. As collegiate football is considered the most popular college sport in the US one can expect, that it is deeply embedded in the American society. In one of his lectures, Clotfelter mentions the way in which every young American has a favorite team he or she follows (John Locke Foundation, 2012).

Clotfelter’s exploration of American football as a consumer good has close ties with the theory of ‘academic capitalism’ which indicates that the marketing value of American football is the result of intricate relationships that have developed between public institutions of higher education and other actors in the social, political and economic context of a new KBE. Within this KBE collegiate American Football is consumed by both external parties as well as, captive market students of the particular institution.
Public universities that wish to integrate into the KBE in order to secure the continuation of their existence, primarily use collegiate sports as a marketing tool to reach external investors and potential students. The external investors that are attracted by the particular field of collegiate football are mostly corporations that wish to obtain advertising rights, merchandising rights, and broadcasting rights. The university’s willingness to enter into an alliance with such an outside actor shows the need for funding that the KBE and the retreat of the government as an influence has created.

The interaction with external organizations is one based on mutual benefit. In the case of American football as a consumer good, we can see that the selling of broadcasting rights and advertising space is a deal that provides the sponsor with a platform for their logo, or the exclusive right to air a certain game, but it provides the university with media exposure on television, causing the university to gain renown and reach potential students, as well as gain the prestige of wearing the logo of a certain high-end brand when it comes to selling merchandising rights. The enforcement of the university identity with the positive identity of a certain ‘athleisure wear’ brand, such as Nike and Adidas, might also add to an increased feeling of community among university students and thereby also increased sales of ‘athleisure wear’ for the sponsor in addition to more applications for the university as the campus becomes more appealing. The increased number of students, or customers, and the new external funds, which can go as high as $8 million for television rights (ESPN, 2008), and $4.62 billion in merchandising (Bundrick, 2013), can, in turn, influence the output of the university of ‘knowledge workers’ and relevant research positively, which might, again, increase the renown and reach of a university. The processes of "marketization" of collegiate football is thus a cycle that endorses and benefits all involved actors in many different sectors of the American society, causing collegiate football to become more and more marketized.

Effects of the "marketization" of collegiate American football can even be noticed in a transnational context. As the reach of the university increases with media exposure and the renown of athletic success in either real athletic achievements or obtaining a certain sponsor, international market might become more aware of the existence of a certain institution. The increased awareness of institutions and their prestige in a national context might attract international students, international academics, and even new research capacities.

Although these developments sound very enticing, many universities still suffer a loss when it comes to the revenue and expenses of their athletic department. This is the case, as the potential appeal of providing football as a consumer good is very much dependent on the division of collegiate football that is played and possible ties to one of the big conferences. This causes the
benefits of this particular appeal of adopting collegiate American football in an academic capitalist regime to be distributed disproportionally to universities that have already benefitted from being part of a large network of organizations as result of the aforementioned historical developments of American football. For smaller universities the appeal might be limited to attracting scholarship students, looking for lower tuitions, these students would still be able to become part of the university’s output to the economy as ‘knowledge worker’ or researcher.

2.4.2 Collegiate American football as a part of an enterprise

The distribution of funds within an institution and the amount of processes build around the managing of the athletics department lead us to consider American collegiate football as an enterprise. When considering this aspect of the sport, Clotfelter mentions the dynamic of American football as part of the collegiate athletics department. He points towards cases where collegiate football makes up for the costs of all further athletics projects at an institution (Clotfelter, 2011). NCAA president, Mark Emmert affirmed this dynamic by saying, “As a president, I say to my women’s golf fans, ‘The most important thing you can do is buy football tickets.’ If you love rowing, buy football tickets. If you love cross country, buy football tickets. We couldn’t do any of those other sports if we weren’t successful in football” (NCAA, 2017). Football is the reason that collegiate athletics can still exist as we see it today (see table 1).

The relationships that cause American football to become part of the institutional enterprise have been touched upon in the section regarding American football as a consumer product. The process of garnering external funds is a struggle that many departments in a university struggle with. With the funds that a university attracts by having successful athletics teams, through sponsorship, merchandising and increased amount of applications through renown, the university might provide funding for better education in economically relevant areas of study, research or other expensive projects.

Slaughter and Rhoades believe the influences of "marketization" are noticeable throughout the entire institution with, for example, the expansion of the managerial branch of a university to accommodate the pressure of 'marketization' by filling jobs such as recruiting students, policing and protecting the use of the university brand to maintain sponsor contracts and to develop marketing strategies to attract new sponsors. According to Slaughter and Rhoades, the appeal of this aspect of collegiate athletics is the increasing ease with which 'marketization' is perpetuated once a
university’s infrastructure has become accommodating to the process. A process that not only enforces the vision of American collegiate football as a consumer good, but also thinks about future investments and is constantly innovating to ensure the survival of the institution in an economy that is asking increasingly more from a public or non-profit institution that receives minimum government help.

Student scholarships and alumni donations are a part of the vision of the institution as an enterprise as a significant amount of money is invested in scholarships and a significant amount of money is received in donations. The amount of donations that many colleges received for their football teams in 2008, for example, totaled multiple 10’s of millions of dollars for 90 percent of the FBS schools (ESPN, 2008). Within the institution as an enterprise the identity of the student is fluent and shaped by circumstances. The student as a captive market and consumers is transformed into an athlete and service provider as he receives a scholarship and is transformed into a possible investor when he becomes an alumni. These processes are integral to the survival of the institution. The accommodation of the student in all his or her identities is key to safeguarding the number of applications. Thus part of the academic enterprise is the maintaining of majors such as residential property managements and sports management which are appealing to athletes.

Though Clotfelter (2011) indicates this function as the institution as an enterprise, it is important to note that Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) indicate that the institutions involved in the ‘academic capitalist regime’ do not wish to be seen as ‘corporatized’. It is crucial for the upholding of the possibility of hosting collegiate athletics and the possibility to use the tax-exempt status, that a university remains within the bounds of what the NCAA and the KBE denote as reasonable for a public institution that still has some role in providing ‘public good’ and genuine amateur sports. To do so, the institution is constantly reconfiguring itself and its marketized athletics departments in order to negotiate the extend to which traditional boundaries of professionalism and legislation regarding the purposes of universities can be transcended in favor of integration into the KBE.

The marketized university functioning in a KBE is constantly changing and adapting strategies to social, political and economic developments in its surroundings. By negotiating its role as a marketized public institution in new situations and looking at the extend to which boundaries can be blurred, the athletics department and institution as an enterprise can maintain a competitive and innovative edge in a free market, competitive ‘academic capitalist regime’.
2.4.3 Collegiate American Football as an institution builder

The aspect of collegiate athletics as an institution builder is very much concerned with the reputation aspect of adopting collegiate athletics. The possible effects of the viewing collegiate American football as a consumer good already indicated that the mere adoption of collegiate American football can provide an institution with a competitive edge over rivals. The possible exposure can cause the university to gain prestige, which can be helpful to an institution in several ways involving several different areas of the KBE.

Clotfelter (2011) mentions several advantages of the introduction of American football. Not only does he indicate that a university will have a further reach, with regard to reaching students, investors, donors and academics as well as help the institutions in situations with a political character.

The prestige that comes with a win in the realm of collegiate football, may also lead to political advantage for an institution and might help built reputation in different fields. According to Clotfelter, more than a few state officials care about the athletic prestige of an institution. He mentions several cases in which nation renown influenced the development of the institution. Clotfelter (2011) mentions the boosted tourism numbers once a university hosts an important game, he mentions how one’s prestige on the football field might also lead to more opportunities, such as joining a conference, positing the case of how Virginia Tech joined ACC. He also mentions the power of collegiate football to break down racial barriers in the 1960s as an integrated football team beat various all-white teams (Clotfelter, 2011).

Collegiate athletics clearly creates some advantages for universities in a political, economic and sometimes even social setting. The importance of collegiate sports, in particular American football, can be traced back to aforementioned history of the sports branch. As one of the oldest, fully Americanized sports, American football has been slowly integrated in American society, even becoming a part of the American dream. It is the integration of American football in the American economy, the American social scene, with, for example the ritual of tailgating and thanksgiving football games and the presence of the game in United States since the beginning of the development of American higher education that make and integrated and aspect influential of the KBE (Slaughter & Rhoades 2004).

The prestige, like the extend to which collegiate American football can be a lucrative consumer good, is very dependent on the quality of the played game and the historical ties a university might have with other important players in the field. It might cause some higher
enrollment numbers or some economic benefit from reaching alumni, but the full extent of political, economic and social influences will be saved with the big players in the collegiate American football scene.

Lastly, the increased focus on the institution’s participation in the collegiate American football tradition can also be a disadvantage to the university’s social, economic and political influence and reach. This can, for example be the case when athletes commit a crime, like a University of North Carolina athlete, who allegedly raped another student in 2016 and got suspended from the team. This form of negative attention might cause the institution to lose prestige and lose it’s competitive advantages in the market for application, funds and research opportunities (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

2.4.4 Collegiate American Football as beacon of campus culture

Even though football fans might hail from all corners of the US, the sports used to be primarily organized by and for students themselves. The power of the on-campus presence of collegiate athletics is a force to be reckoned with. In the ‘academic capitalist’ vision of the university in the KBE, the contemporary campus culture is an important vehicle to reach the student consumer both before and after enrollment. Before enrollment the idea of a strong campus identity and culture can attract potential students who, after leaving high school, are looking for a new identity and lifestyle to take on (Slaughter & Rhoades). It is important to appeal to new student as they are constantly looking for the best return on their investment in their higher education. It is therefor that many universities hire several advertising experts in the process of “marketization” in order to effectively attract the new students with a strong vision of their brand.

After enrollment a student becomes a captive market and still has to be enticed the spend their money on university services and merchandise (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). The presence of a strong athletic representation can enforce the feeling of pride that already enrolled students feel and express about their university. This can cause an increase in sales of merchandise, which can consequently result in a stronger voicing of campus identity and more applications.

A strong athletic tradition can also bring students closer together in different ways. One example Clotfelter (2011) provides is the traditional tailgating on a game day. The tradition brings students together in the stadium and before the game, creating a tight community of students, it is because of this reason that tickets for university games are often free for student (Clotfelter, 2011). This consumer group can then easily access the event.
The university aims to sell a lifestyle and to their ritualized game days of collegiate American football should not be underestimated. Collegiate athleticism is a great way to strengthen the university brand and community spirit. Not only does game day provide a traditional, ritualized process of bringing students together (Clotfelter, 2011). Tickets are often free for university students, making the event easily accessible for this consumer group.

Aside from attracting new students a strong campus identity can also result in the easier acquisition of sponsor contracts, as the student consumer’s willingness to invest in campus merchandise is greater. In turn, offering merchandise from certain high-end brands might even boost sales of merchandise even more, initiating an even greater feeling of community on a campus.

Clotfelter notes that students enrolled in universities with bigger athletics department ‘spent less time in class and studying, spent more time in extracurricular activities, felt out of place and overwhelmed more often, and engaged more often in heavy drinking than did those who attended universities without such programs’. (Clotfelter, 2011, p. 173). Indicating that a strong athletic presence on campus does not necessarily lead to a more satisfactory college experience for all students, even though the economic advantages can be great.

2.5 Chapter conclusion

By applying the principles of academic capitalism to a small case study of collegiate American football programs and examining the fit of the developments with Clotfelter’s categories of functions of collegiate athletics we can conclude several things. Firstly, it is clear that the potential for big-time academic can be extremely lucrative to an institution, especially when considering the role it can have in the initiation and perpetuating of different strategies and processes in the integration of the public institution in the KBE.

However, in order to reach the full market potential of a varsity collegiate American football program, the circumstances surrounding the program should perfectly align with the expectations the academic capitalism regime has of the program (e.g. the highest quality of play, a place in a influential conference and no interfering social circumstances). With these ideal circumstances in mind a varsity American football program would be a very logical addition to the institutions athletics department. However, looking at the reality that many programs face in the contemporary economy, with the program only slightly boosting the student applications by contributing to a consistent campus culture and the opportunity of a scholarship, a varsity American
football program is far from the ideal 'marketization' tool that both Clotfelter and Slaughter and Rhoades make it out to be.
Chapter 3: The development of collegiate esports

3.1 Esports

When looking at the potential advantages of adopting esports into higher education institutions from an ‘academic capitalist’ perspective, it is important to understand what esports entail and what elements make this branch of sports so popular and controversial. Though esports include both offline and online gaming, on both consoles like Sony’s Playstation and Microsoft’s XBOX, the current research will focus on online PC esports.

The term esports, or electronic sports, refers to a form of competitive gaming that emerged in the late 1990s (Schmidt & Schreffler, 2015). Since the 1990s, the esports industry has blossomed into a worldwide phenomenon with significant entertainment value for both those are and are not participating in the game and a large stream of revenue. Competitive gaming did not start with the introduction of the personal computer (PC), but developed in the arcades of early gamer culture. Arcade games were played on stand-alone machines that required money to play and could be found in public spaces. Most games, like PACMAN and Donkey Kong were designed to beat a high score which was connected to the particular machine. The phenomenon of arcade gaming gained popularity in the 1960s and 1970s when the first simple machines were released. Atari first used the term “arcade” when they released their game Pong (Chikhani, 2015). Slowly machines popped up in different public spaces such as malls and bars until the arcade hype was in full swing in the 1980s (Chikhani, 2015).

Not long after the development of the first arcade games began, console games came along. Console games were played on a console which had to be connected to a tv. The home-console gaming business was booming in the 1970s and early 1980s with many different companies all trying to get in on the new trend (M.J. Wolf, 2012).

PC gaming was boosted by the North American video games crash of 1983, that caused the console gaming market to become oversaturated (Chikhani, 2015). The video game market bounced back in years to follow, but only with a few large companies surviving. Despite the crash arcades tried to recover from the harsh blow. However, by then, home computers, like the Apple II, would be more affordable and easier to play than the large machines (M.J. Wolf, 2012).

The competitive aspect of gaming was born in the 1980s when the first tournaments, hosted by game studios themselves, became a popular spectacle. Atari, for example, held the first game tournament for Space Invaders in 1980. The tournament was immensely popular with more than ten thousand participants (Sylvester & Rennie, 2017). According to Edwards (2013), the first esport
was a First-Person Shooter (FPS) game called *Quake*. The first *Quake* tournament was held in 1997 at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), one of the world’s largest video game conventions, by Microsoft (M.J. Wolf, 2012). The winner of this tournament: Dennis “Thresh” Fong, is considered the world’s first professional gamer, earning a red Ferrari 328GTS convertible and $5,000 for his win in the tournament (Baker, 2016). This prize seems is just a fraction of the prize for the winner of the 2015 International Compendium Championship for *Defense of the Ancient 2*. The prize pool exceeded $18 million (Chalk, 2015).

The rise of PC gaming was, again, boosted when stronger processors and the internet came into the picture. Due to these developments multiplayer games could be played at a distance, broadening the target audience of the games and eliminating geographical restrictions that home console gaming and arcade gaming had. Blizzard Entertainment’s *Starcraft*, released in 1998, was one of the most popular early PC games. In the game it was possible for a player to be matched up with other gamers, even complete strangers. The rift between recreational players and more serious players gradually became more apparent as a small group of players with complex strategies took the upper hand in the online community (Lynch, 2016). Especially in South Korea, many became interested in watching this small, almost professional, group play. Within the next two years the *StarCraft* matches would be shown as a professional sports segment on South Korean television (Lynch, 2016). With these developments, *StarCraft* became one of the driving forces behind the world of esports (Edwards, 2013).

### 3.2 The MOBA in esports

Since those heydays of online gaming, esports has gradually gained more popularity and has become one of the fastest growing industries in the entertainment business. Peter Warman, CEO of data analytics service Newzoo, calls the esports industry “the biggest thing to hit the games market since the launch of the iPhone in 2007” (Young, 2016, para. 7). The competitive online gaming industry went through rapid changes with the introduction of some of the biggest games of the moment in the early 2010s. Games like the *Overwatch, StarCraft II, Fortnite Battle Royale, Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO), and Defense of the Ancients II (Dota 2)* are just a couple of the many games that are played in a competitive setting worldwide.

The current most popular game type, by far, is the Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA). Sports themed games, where a traditional sport is simulated, and first person shooters,
where the player shoots other players from a first person perspective, are also popular genres (Jonasson & Thiborg, 2010).

In MOBA games, players play a character on a team that has to compete against another team. In the standard format you see the playing landscape, or “map”, from a Birdseye view and two or more teams consisting of players playing an avatar battle it out (Bossum & Dunning, 2016). Many popular games like *Dota 2* and *StarCraft II* are MOBA’s. MOBA’s are often thought to be most similar to traditional sports as they have a simple and understandable goal, for example: capture the flag, destroy the base or kill all enemies. To reach this goal players have to develop strategies based on each character’s specific skills and a player’s specific talents, much like in a football or basketball team, where players have different positions and specialties (Everson, 2013). Due to these simple game mechanics the games are easy to follow, leading to the enormous interest in online streaming of competitions through Youtube and game streaming platform Twitch.

### 3.3 League of Legends

The current research will focus its analysis of the potential market value of esports on the developments regarding *League of Legends (LoL)*. LoL is currently one of the most important MOBA’s. The game was developed by studio Riot Games in 2011 and rose to the top of the esports charts in 2012 with an estimated 100 million players (Paul, 2017). Statista, a statistics portal, stated that in 2015 the most-played PC game on gaming platform Raptr in, was LoL with a share of 22.92 percent of all games (Statista, 2015). In 2014, 40.000 spectators paid to see the *LoL* World Championship in South Korea, in addition to this 11.2 million concurrent viewers watched the match online, showing how important live-streaming is for the world of esports and the popularity of *LoL* (Gafford, 2014).

The gameplay of *LoL* is similar to the gameplay of other MOBA’s with a simple goal. In a *LoL* game, two teams of five players, playing characters called champions, have the ultimate goal of destroying the opposing team’s “nexus”, a main component of their base (Ferrari, 2013). The champion that a player controls has different special attacks and statistics and in the field they fill one of five positions: Attack, Damage, Carry (ADC); Support; Midlaner; Top-laner; or Jungler. Each one of these positions has a specific duty and in order to successfully destroy the opponent’s nexus it is important to take this into account when making a strategy (Ferrari, 2013).

The competitions surrounding *LoL* build up to an annual *League of Legends* World Championship (LWC), which has been hosted annually since 2011. In order to select teams for this
championship, Riot Games established the *League of Legends* Championship Series (LCS) in both North America (NA LCS) and Europe (EU LCS). In these competitions 10 teams from each continent compete until there are six teams left to play in the playoffs. Three teams are chosen per continent to then participate in the LWC.

As of 2018, The NA LCS has been franchised, meaning that teams can pay to get a permanent position in the LCS and showing that the competition is mirroring the organization of other already established sports in the American sports culture (Leslie, 2018). In 2019 this principal will also be implemented in EU LCS. Outside of these competitions, different non-Riot Games qualifiers are organized in China and other Asian and South American countries to determine which of those teams can participate in the World championship. The popularity of the championship has peaked the interest of powerful sponsors such as Coca Cola leading to even more revenue and prestige for the esports teams.

3.4 Developments of esports in college setting

Esports have only recently become a part of the longstanding tradition of athletics programs in American higher education. As it had long been the subject of debate concerning the legitimacy of its status as a branch of sports, the introduction of the first varsity esports program by a brave, small university in Illinois, seemed to have settled the debate. Robert Morris University in Illinois (RMU) became a pioneer of “varsity” esports in 2014 as they built special $100.000 training facilities, sponsored by iBuyPower (Wong, 2017) and started providing partial scholarships for 25 recruited students for *LoL*, *CS:GO*, *Overwatch*, *Heroes of the Storm*, *Hearthstone* and *Smash Brothers* (“Gamers to...,” 2014).

Prior to 2014 the discourse on esports, whether in collegiate or non-collegiate setting had been dominated by the question of the legitimacy of considering esports an actual branch of ‘sports’. Different experts and researchers have looked into this issue (e.g., Hallman & Giel, 2017; Heere, 2017; Jenny et al., 2017; Jonasson & Thiborg, 2010; Witkowski, 2012) and they found various developments and characteristics of esports that were not go hand in hand with the definition of traditional sports. Traditional sports have always been defined by their emphasis on physicality, competitive aspects and institutionalization (Guttmann, 2004). According to many, the lack of physicality is a major problem with the more traditional sports experts (Jenny et al., 2017). However, others believe that the amount of physical skill put into the training and performance of esports athletes is enough to debunk this argument (Li, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2016). It has also
been proven that the amount of movements that esports athletes perform on a keyboard under a minute is much higher than the amount of movement an untrained recreational gamer can showcase. In addition, it has also been states that the amount of cortisol professional gamers produce during a match is similar to the levels of a race car driver (Schütz, 2016).

Questions of lacking governance and institutionalization remained a second major issue with the acknowledgement of esports as sports, but before the academic argument was settled, the adoption of esports by RMU settled the debate prematurely. In addition, the United States government’s decided to grant official athlete visas to esports players, identifying them as full-fledged athletes (Tassi, 2013). This indicated that esports had rid itself of the previous scholarly debates, and had been propelled into a new phase in its evolution as a part of the collegiate athletics department which called for new theoretical approaches to the phenomenon.

With the introduction of the varsity program of at RMU the gates towards a future as recognized athletes had been opened for student-run esports associations and research concluded that in 2017, about 40 percent of the esports teams at higher education institutions were still run by students, the rest had been picked up by athletic departments and academic departments since 2014 (Ashton, 2017).

Today, it is hard to get a complete picture of the amount of collegiate esports teams in the entirety of the US. This is partly due to the increased popularity of the sports branch, but also due to the large amount of “unofficial” student-run teams and a lack of governing bodies that keep track of the different programs. The organization of esports had been researched before, but with the rapidly changing organization much of the discourse that was written on esports is already outdated. Bernard Suits (2007), a specialist in sports ethics, provides the basic theory on institutionalization of sports, he believes that sports are goal-directed activities that adhere to certain rules. This is no problem in the realm of esports, where specific games, LoL for example, have their its own protected virtual environment. The teams compete with a certain amount of players at a tournament where most rules and regulations are clearly written down. It also is without question that if an esports athlete does not adhere to the rules of their specific game they will not be successful or removed from the game. It might be said that esports, thus, meets the requirements of institutionalization in its simplest form.

However, institutionalization entails more than just having clear rules to adhere to. Institutionalization refers to the stability of an activity provided that it standardized rules, a formalized learning process, the emergence of experts and the emergence of trainers, coaches and governing bodies (Suits, 2007). The relative young branch of esports has witnessed an explosive
growth of competing organizations that all want to govern different championships like the World e-Sports Games, World Cyber Games and more. However, as many journals and articles have failed to mention, these organizations have mostly stopped existing by 2018. The surviving organizations that provide platforms for gamers and organize tournaments, like game studios themselves, the Electronic Sports League (ESL), DreamHack and Intel are still competing to gain the most power. In order to still be able to go forward in the undiscovered and ever-changing field of esports, these organizations have joined forces to provide some stability and regulation. New organizations such as the World esports Association (WESA) (WESA website), established in 2016 for the ESL CS:GO league, and the Esports Integrity Coalition (ESIC), formed with the help of ESL, DreamHack and Intel, are slowly trying to provide a sense of cohesion and security in the industry (“About Us”, 2018). As not all organizations are providing rules and regulations for the same games, we see that the development of these guidelines is much stronger in the case of popular and somewhat older games such as CS:GO and LoL. We are taking baby steps towards providing worldwide regulations for all the games in the esports industry.

In the collegiate scene, a specific wave of collegiate institutionalization is washing over the industry with the establishment of different collegiate governing associations. It is an interesting process, as a fully commercialized branch of sports is trying to find its place in the gradually more ‘marketized’ but public higher education system. Aside from the leagues and competitions organized by game studios themselves, mostly in combination with big tournament organizations such as the Collegiate Star League (CSL), governing organizations, which bare more similarities to the NCAA, are being formed.

The National Association of Collegiate esports (NACE), formed in 2016 to become the governing body of varsity collegiate esports in the US, is one of the bigger organizations we currently see in this field. It has around 80 member school with a budget of $9 million (“About - Collegiate Esports Governing Body”, 2018). The NACE has grown considerably since its foundation in 2016 as, back then, it still had around 30 members (M. Smith, 2017). However, NACE is not alone as other organizations such as the American Collegiate Esports League (ACEL) and Tespa also try to provide student-athletes with the best opportunities to showcase their skills. On certain subjects these governing bodies overlap. While NACE is focussed on providing specific help for varsity teams in CS:GO, Hearthstone, Overwatch, LoL, Heroes of the Storm, Paladins, Rocket League and Smite, ACEL only focusses on LoL teams (non-varsity and varsity) (“About ACEL”, 2018) and Tespa, a Blizzard Entertainment aligned organization, focusses on organizing competitions for StarCraft II, Hearthstone, Heroes of the Storm and Overwatch (“Homepage”,...
The fact that only three organizations remain indicates increased institutionalization of the collegiate sports league.

The amount of competitions that are offered to students has also become more regulated throughout the last couple of years. Competitions such as Heroes of the Dorm, the different Collegiate StarLeague (CSL) tournaments, including the uLoL Campus Series and the Midwest Campus Clash (MWCC), and the American Video Game League (AVGL) have all become established names and are now the competitions that different teams work towards (Morrison, 2018). The CSL is the biggest organization of collegiate tournaments at the moment, with eleven different leagues for different games and collaborations with the biggest game studios. Within the CSL, the most popular LoL tournament is the uLoL Campus Series, however, as stated before, this is not the only collegiate competition in North America. Both uLoL and the ACEL work with the traditional conference model, uLoL including a north, east, south and west conference (College League of Legends, 2018) and ACEL including six conferences they established themselves (“About ACEL”, 2018), making them very similar to big-time collegiate sports. ULoL even has both a regular season and postseason playoffs, like collegiate American football (college League of Legends, 2018). The latest step towards institutionalization has been the introduction of franchising in the NA LCS (Leslie, 2018). With this franchising, sponsors and teams will have a more secure position in the championships and with the increased confidence of that market, society might be more willing to see esports as real sports (Chang, 2017). The collegiate esports competitions are, though maybe not intentionally, slowly becoming more similar to the traditional sports competitions we already know and this might be a big step towards a more stable esports environment.

The question that remains on many minds is why the NCAA has not incorporated esports in its program yet. Some argue that the NCAA is lacking the knowledge to properly govern esports, as the NCAA hired consulting and marketing firm Intersport to explore the esports landscape for the organization in 2017 (Radford, 2017). In addition to this the lack of institutionalization of esports might still be a problem. Under Title IX, a civil rights law that is meant to regulate equal rights in education and college athletics, it was decided that an activity needs to have coaches, practices a governing body and a defined competition season to be considered a sport (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2008). One could argue that the NCAA could provide more stability in institutionalization by appointing one official tournament for a specific game, but this would be a nearly impossible task in the competitive and commercial industry of esports.

Another reason would be the bad fit of the commercialized and revenue-focused esports industry with the NCAA concept of amateurism. In 2007, the NCAA was deemed responsible for
the certification of athletes’ amateurism ("Amateurism", 2018). A task that has already proven to be difficult to uphold in the field of a traditional sport such as collegiate football (Rosner & Shropshire, 2011). It would prove to be almost impossible to uphold the standards in the fully commercialized field of esports, as the rule “No student shall represent a college or university in any intercollegiate game or contest . . . who has at any time received, either directly or indirectly, money, or any other consideration” (Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012) would exclude almost all esports athletes as almost all esports competitions involve prize money or gamer gear as a prize. With the low average age of professional esports athletes these days, sometimes starting at the age of 14, indication that their career started well before they enter college (Hollist, 2015), the existence of a platform such as twitch, which pays gamers who stream and the wide array of possibilities of participating in gaming competitions for money, hardware (keyboards, headset etc.) or in-game content, it is unlikely that an esports athlete has not had any contact with this “professional” side of competitive gaming before they go to college. In order to for the NCAA to be able to accept esports, which according to several news sources is inevitable on the long run (Blum, 2017), it must revise its rules on amateurism, which could, in the end, mean a drastic change for traditional sports on the verge of professionalism.

Aside from the struggles with the development of governance and institutionalization, esports also has different sources of income. Unlike traditional collegiate sports, esports do not have receive money from athletics departments or governing organizations. Many competitions in the collegiate field provide scholarships as a prize. This, of course, is the result of the lack of institutionalization we still see in the collegiate esports field today. In 2015, the LoL North American Collegiate Championship, predecessor of the uLoL Campus series, allocated a total of prize pool of $360,000 among its players (Lingle, 2015). Together with the partial scholarships that varsity players are already getting from their universities this is almost the amount that one would expect with a full scholarship that division I athletes get. In addition to the scholarship money that is provided with competitions, sponsors have also slowly started to show their interest in collegiate esports. The aforementioned company, iBuyPower is one of these early sponsors that did not hesitate to get in on the esports action (Wong, 2017). Streaming can also be a steady source of revenue for athletes and, as television rights are still in the hands of the game studios and competition organizers traditional media broadcasters are not a source of revenue for schools and teams. Many schools and teams do have their own Twitch accounts, or channels, to stream their practices to their fans in exchange for a sum of money based on the amount of watchers you have (RMUEsports Twitch Channel, n.d.). Facebook and Twitch are both big investors in the live
streaming of esports competitions. Team Dignitas, a professional esports team, has recently sold the broadcasting rights to all their matches to Facebook (Heitner, 2017) and twitch entered into a $90 million dollar deal for the rights of broadcasting all Overwatch matches (Fisher, 2018).

3.5 Collegiate American football in academic capitalist context

In order to find its place in the ‘academic capitalist’ regime, esports has to become somewhat de-commercialized. We need to lay bare the potential processes and networks that LoL could set in motion and open up in the ‘academic capitalist’ regime with regard to the university’s integration into the KBE.

3.5.1 Collegiate LoL as a consumer good

The consumption of collegiate LoL is a little less easy to keep track of than the physical ticket, merchandise and sponsor we can find with traditional sports. Most consumption of collegiate LoL takes place online. The main consumers of collegiate LoL according to the ‘academic capitalist’ regime are, external parties, in this case, fans of the team and students, who are part of the universities captive market.

The reach of the institutions and the specific athletics branch is crucial to determining how effective the specific form of athletics is as a marketing and integration tool. As LoL competitions are played in both a physical, the player arena, and virtual space, the online map where the avatars fight, LoL has a similar way of consumption as American football games, which are played in a physical space as well as being broadcasted online and on television. LoL however, is often played in a much smaller arena. This means that American football is often consumed in a more physical setting, which often involves the student body as the main audience, due to their free admission. This might indicate that American football has a stronger influence on the formation of campus identity. The revenue generated with ticket sales would therefor also be bigger for American football games.

However, as LoL is a globally renowned game with fans all over the world and non-restricted streaming on online platforms, the fanbase that watches the games has the potential to far outreach the size of the fanbase concerned with watching a game that was developed and popularized in the United States of which the broadcasting on both the television and the internet is often restricted to a certain provider or region. In addition, the fan base of LoL in general is still growing explosively as was proven by the viewer rates of the LoL world championships in 2012 and
2013, which were 8 million and 32 million respectively, showing an explosive growth in the size (Hollist, 2015). The larger consumer base might lead to larger stream revenue, which are momentarily attracting many external parties who cannot wait to invest in advertising rights or broadcasting rights for *LoL* (Nguyen, 2017).

The relative small amount of *LoL* teams that are currently playing for universities in the United States also reduces the competition of other universities, thus providing a competitive edge in the fight for more applicants and consumers. A fight that, as mentioned before is usually won by the most prestigious and successful university teams for American Football. There is, however, no guarantee that the amount of teams will remain the same in coming years.

As mentioned before the most prominent source of revenue for collegiate American football is merchandising. An incredible source of revenue, community spirit and sponsorship deals with large brands. This is a source of revenue that is not equalled by any part of the esports market (Statista 2017).

The power of collegiate *LoL* as a marketing tool momentarily lies in exclusivity as a young branch of collegiate sports and the immense reach that the sport has. A reach that could in both a national and international network reach more potential investors, applicants and academics than American collegiate football could probably reach in the KBE network with the perfect circumstances. The national competition might, however, increase with the growing popularity of collegiate *LoL* in the United States.

3.5.2 Collegiate *LoL* as a part of the enterprise

Just like with college American football, *LoL* is gradually being institutionalized within the higher education, causing it to participate in the intricate networks and relationships with internal and external actors in the KBE. The revenue generated by collegiate *LoL* as a consumer good are now part of the web of investment and wealth redistribution within the institution as student gamers receive scholarships for their work and generate revenue that can be redistributed towards the expansions of sponsor deals'marketization' strategies and processes of the institution.

Even though collegiate *LoL* is contribution a small part of revenue by closing sponsor deals, selling broadcasting right and reaching new applicants, most esports are still a part of the athletics department that lives off the collegiate American football revenue. This no wonder, as RMU granted over half a million dollars in esports scholarships in 2016 (TEDx Talks, 2016).
Currently the appeal of collegiate *LoL* with regard to its function in the institutional enterprise is not rooted in generating revenue, but can be found in the recruitment of new applicants. Collegiate *LoL* appeal to a niche market of student consumers that have never had an interest in the traditional idea of sports, who are interested in KBE relevant fields of study such as artificial intelligence and other technology studies (Gaudiosi, 2015). This function can also be very valuable in the recruitment of international students, with the immense popularity of esports in Asian countries, collegiate *LoL* might grant the university opportunities to interact with the Asian market when it comes to student exchange, academic exchange and intellectual property. This can greatly influence the potential research capacities of the university and the quality of the ‘economic output’ that the university delivers to the American society.

A more unconventional benefit of sponsorships like RMU’s deal with iBuyPower is the increased presence of specific technology in an institution. Like the University of California, Irvine (UCI) showed in 2016 an esports arena, with power hardware could be used for recreation, education, research and athletics training. The availability of this technology might boost both the quality of research output as well as attract more students who would like to work with the newest technology (UCI, 2016).

Thus, though the functions of *LoL* and American football in the institutional enterprise are very different, one being focused on examining how far the boundaries of ‘public good’ and amateurism in order to gain external funding. The other trying to adjust the benefits of its commercialized nature and identity with a basis technological fields in order to further the institutions contribution to the KBE. Both filling a niche within the enterprise that would be left unfilled if it had been absent in the institution. This being the enormous amount of revenue that American football provides to keep the rest of the enterprise running and the inability to attract one of the most wanted consumer groups in the KBE for collegiate *LoL*.

3.5.3 Collegiate League of Legends as an institution builder

As a relatively young part of the collegiate sports branch, esports might not have had enough time to become as widely known and influential as many traditional sports. However, the influence of esports in the world of athletics and in politics can already be noticeable in the actions of other actors in this field of athletics.

Not only does the new branch of sports challenge universities and other organizations to rethink the boundaries of amateurism and sports, it has also played a big role in advocating diversity in collegiate athletics. Many *LoL* teams are actually co-ed as gaming skill are developed equally
among men and women, this provided universities with a great opportunity to provide more diversity in the athletics programs (Parker, 2017). The university of California, Irvine (UCI) has now launched a unique esports program that pays more attention to recruiting women (Rico, 2016). The University of California Berkley has proven that these initiative can be a success since they launched a women in gaming initiative in collaboration with Riot Games itself (“Press Release...”, 2018). With this move Riot Games proves that pushing boundaries in the political and social realm can be rewarded. In addition to diversifying the student athlete populations with regard to gender, the unique appeal that collegiate LoL holds for marginalized groups such as Asian student-athletes can help the institution’s image as a university with a diverse population (Demby, 2014), which might lead to economic, social and political advantages such as subsidies, and an increased number of application of students from said marginalized group.

The adoption of a new and young, uninstitutionalized branch of collegiate sports can also grant the institution some freedom in exploring the power structures in the collegiate athletic field. The forming of new conferences such as the aforementioned PACG is one such result of the introduction of esports. With the original PAC-12 universities forming a new conference for esports we can see that the power of the original conferences does not reach as far beyond the realm of traditional sports as one might think (J. Wolf, 2018). This grants the opportunity for reform in the stale athletics traditions and provided smaller universities with the opportunity to become athletic powerhouses, like RMU and UCI with the help of esports.

It is thus that collegiate LoL’s unique position as a new phenomenon in a somewhat uninstitutionalized branch of sports that provides it with the opportunity to examine it’s borders with being tied to governing bodies and pre-existing power struggles like collegiate American Football.

3.5.4 Collegiate League of Legends as beacon of campus culture

Esports have already proven to be a uniting factor among fans from a specific team who are spread around world. With the virtual space that esports provide for their spectators and fans, it almost seems ignorant to look at fandom on such a small geographic scale of the university campus.

As varsity esports teams at universities will be part of the athletics department, they will probably be able to hitch a ride on the campus spirit that has been created through traditional sports. However, as stated before, the potential for collegiate LoL to cross gender gaps and the appeal it has to “tech-savvy” students might unite the marginalized groups at universities.
The larger presence of collegiate American football on campuses, with the football stadiums as the prime example, already indicates that American football has become embedded in the college experience. The traditional game day celebrations, with the ritual of tailgating and the emphasis on merchandising are part of the marketing strategies that have been developed throughout the various decades that American football has existed.

Though studies have shown that spectator motives of traditional sports and electronic sports spectators are very similar and that collegiate LoL has become more accessible to non-gamers (Pizzo et al., 2017), the experience of the traditions of established collegiate sports has shaped the consumer behavior on campus for decades. It is the experience of engaging in the consumer behavior that has been intricately shaped by the ‘marketized’ institution in combination with the brand endorsement of a sponsor and that provides the consumer with an identity. An identity that has no been influence by the young branch of collegiate athletics that has yet to become more embedded in the longstanding history of American higher education institutions.
4. Conclusion

In the end the analysis of two small case studies of both collegiate American football and collegiate League of Legends has laid bare the ways in which the different social, economic and political developments in American society has shaped higher education and specifically the department of collegiate athletics.

The focus on the academic capitalist regime, with the help of Charles Clotfelters supposed functions of collegiate athletics at institutions of higher educations has showed how the intricate relationships of different actors in the contemporary society, based on the need for knowledge have reconfigured the demand for

After conducting both small studies and comparing the results there is no one cultural phenomenon better than the other, as the diverse background of both sport make the two forms of athleticsism are so different that they do not inhibit each other existence.

On the contrary, where American football focusses appeals to the revenue generating needs of the institution as actor in the knowledge-based economy, Collegiate league of legends focusses on exploring the freedom a new branch of sports has in the tradition of collegiate athletics. By challenging power struggles and endorsing diversity, the young branch of sports might be able to speak to niche markets that the immensely big collegiate sports tradition, with its stiff institutionalization and embeddedness in the American society cannot reach.

Answering the question of whether the adoption of collegiate esports is wise discision with a “yes”, as long as it gets a place in the athletic tradition next to the more intritualialized programs that keep the university running in an economy with increasing pressure for funding, innovation and competition.
5. Implications for further research

There are many ways in which the current research has been limited in various ways in order to examine a clearly defined part of the American collegiate athletics tradition within the given timeframe. The choices made in the current research were based on personal interest by the writer and has left much information for other scholars to explore.

The question of whether the addition of esports to the collegiate athletics department of higher education institutions has been wise, has been answered partially and examine thoroughly from a marketing perspective.

Though this research provides an overview of the two paths both university sports branches have taken to come where they are now, there are many more collegiate sports, like basketball that are also rather popular and more centralized than collegiate football. To get an idea of the full scope of similarities and differences between the marketing power of esports and traditional sports, one should also look into the development of lower division sports which might be more participatory in nature and less commercialized, but are as much an integral part of the college experience as their more popular counterparts.

In addition, the area of esports is constantly expanding with new games being added every year. Looking into different games and tournaments might also provide a good idea of which game tradition is already institutionalized the most and would thus prove to be a good sport for an organization such as the NCAA to start with. Other researches could also look into the development of a new governing body for esports in particular, or what specific reform is needed for the NCAA to be fully compatible with esports.

Many different paths still need to be explored in order to fully comprehend the value of collegiate athletics, whether traditional or modern, is for universities and how far the influence of the phenomenon on university experience and student identity reaches. Hopefully the current study has cleared at least a small part of the path for the next scholar.
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