



## Defining the Role of the Director of Basketball Operations. An Investigation of Role Ambiguity within Intercollegiate Athletic Departments.

Jimmy Smith, Ph.D<sup>1\*</sup>, Rachel Madsen, Ph.D<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor Gonzaga University, School of Education, Sport Management 502 E. Boone Ave, Spokane, WA 99258

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor Ithaca College, School of Business, 327 Park Center Ithaca, NY 14850

**\*Corresponding Author:** Jimmy Smith, Ph.D, Associate Professor Gonzaga University, School of Education, Sport Management 502 E. Boone Ave, Spokane, WA 99258

**Abstract:** The current study sought to understand if NCAA Division I Directors of Basketball Operations (DOBO) experience role ambiguity due to the way the way the position has evolved. Role ambiguity refers to the absence of well-defined understandings about the actions necessary to complete the tasks for a given position and the Role Ambiguity Scale (RAS) was used to collect data from current DOBOs. Results showed that role ambiguity is evident in among certain areas of roles for DOBOs, but collectively DOBOs do not experience a significant level of ambiguity. Due to the lack of prior investigation regarding the DOBO position, several interesting findings were found including a significant difference between male and female DOBOs with regard to career aspirations.

**Keywords:** Director of Basketball Operations (DOBO), Role ambiguity, NCAA, Career aspirations

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past four decades, participation rates within college sport have increased exponentially. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report (NCAA, 2017), participation rates have steadily risen since 1983 for all NCAA levels. Female athletes have increased 60% to more than 205,000 student-athletes while male athletes have risen 20% to more than 265,000. Given this increase in college sport participation around the United States, the rise in college sport commercialism followed (Jozsa, 2012). This commercialism led to greater pressure for athletic administrators to meet financial goals and, especially for coaches, to compete against and recruit the best talent. The increase in responsibilities for coaches includes student-athlete recruitment, revenue generation, team travel, budgeting, and fundraising (Gilbert, Côte, & Mallett, 2006; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Additionally, team competition has increasingly focused less on local opponents and has garnered much more national attention, especially in college basketball (e.g., March Madness).

According to the Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report from the NCAA (2017), the number of NCAA basketball teams across all Divisions has increased 32% for female and 31% for men since the early 1980s. One could argue that with the increase in intercollegiate basketball teams across the United States a reduction of the pool of college basketball players for a given team would result. Therefore, one could also argue that an increased workload for college basketball coaches and the recruitment of competitive players from this pool would be additionally challenging. With more challenges in recruiting and putting forth a winning program, new basketball staff position emerged, known as a Director of Basketball Operations (DOBO). Although there is no clear definition of the position or when the first DOBO was developed, the DOBO is typically responsible for the day-to-day business and operations of the team.

Today, the DOBO is a common position among NCAA Division I basketball staffs, yet, little research exists related to the position and those who occupy it. There is an existing body of research surrounding college basketball coaching, such as male and female earnings gaps (Humphreys, 2000); human capital differences between male and female Division I coaches (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002);

head/assistant coach mentoring relationship (Bower, 2011); predictors of student-athletes entering the coaching profession (Cunningham & Singer, 2010; Moran-Miller & Flores, 2011); and gender-typing of head and assistant coaches (Madsen, Burton, & Clark, 2017). However, given that the DOBO position does not typically involve coaching duties, the aforementioned coaching research does not provide a sufficient understanding of the complexities of the DOBO.

Given the relatively new status of the DOBO position and the way it emerged, it seems likely that it was never purposely designed like other college athletics positions (i.e., associate athletic director for external operations or associate athletic director for development). Rather, the DOBO resulted from the coaching staff delegating daily business operations to a staff member. Anecdotally, the role of the DOBO seems to vary from one team to another due to the nature of the position not being specifically defined and the seemingly arbitrary duties that are often delegated to the DOBO. This uncertainty may lead to those in the position to experience role ambiguity or the lack of understanding of duties and responsibilities of the employee (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Sakires, Doherty & Misener, 2009). Based on this, we set out to better understand the DOBO position and those who occupy it. Therefore, the research questions became:

*RQ1: Is role ambiguity evident for the Director of Basketball Operations position among NCAA Division I men's and women's basketball teams?*

*RQ2: What responsibilities do DOBOs hold in their position?*

From these results, coaches and sport managers may be able to enhance their understanding of their athletic department personnel and the duties they perform. This understanding could better position those experiencing role ambiguity with the resources that may improve the job performance.

## **2. ROLE AMBIGUITY**

Role ambiguity theory refers to the absence of a well-defined understanding about the actions necessary to complete tasks for an employee (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Sakires et al., 2009). Several categories are linked to an employee experiencing role ambiguity including (1) consequences based on the actions performed in the position; (2) awareness of situations (i.e., goals and objectives) that is not produced by the employee (i.e., coach) and likelihood of or the outcomes of achieving those goals and objectives; (3) employees should understand expectations of their superior, how the employee is evaluated, and the consequences of achievement or failure of one's responsibilities (Kahn et al., 1964). Role ambiguity among employees may damage the progress of the employee as well as the organization (Kahn et al., 1964, Sakires et al., 2009). Given that the DOBO is a relatively new position compared to the likes of the athletic director position and other coaching positions, it is possible that the position was never purposely designed, but rather resulted from the coaching staff passing off daily time consuming and possibly unwanted duties to the DOBO. Therefore, the DOBO may experience role ambiguity, which might possibly hinder the progress of the team or organization.

With more than 400 DOBO positions within the NCAA Division I ranks, the current research is important to not only build an understanding of the DOBO position. Given that the literature regarding the DOBO is scant, utilizing the foundational elements of role ambiguity is two-fold. This research provides insight into organizational effectiveness for coaches, teams, and athletic departments. High levels of role ambiguity is known to be harmful to the life cycle of organizations through decreased job performance, less effort on the job, reduced organizational commitment and decreased job satisfaction. Hence, low levels of role ambiguity would show greater effort in job performance and improved job satisfaction (Yun, Takeuchi, & Liu, 2007; Sakires et al., 2009). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to better understand the DOBO from the perspective of those who hold this position. Gathering this preliminary data enabled the authors of the current research to begin to recognize how the DOBO position *belongs* into the current coaching and athletic department system.

Second, with several intercollegiate athletic departments employing as many as 400 coaches and sport managers (Smith & Washington, 2014), the need for further review of role ambiguity within intercollegiate athletic departments is necessary as the size of athletic departments are increasingly growing. Given this significant growth, it is likely that the DOBO is not the only position to evolve with limited considerations to specifically defining the new role. The current research fills an academic

void using role ambiguity theory within college sport, particularly with the under-researched position of the DOBO. From a sport management perspective, this research may open the door to future research within intercollegiate athletic departments using role ambiguity theory and other role theories to further understand current positions (e.g., associate athletic directors) or newly formed positions similar to that of the DOBO. This research may also aid in the developmental path of future intercollegiate coaches and administrators.

The progression of this paper follows a standard format, however, it is the literature review that is positioned slightly different as the literature related to role ambiguity among intercollegiate athletic departments is limited. Therefore, the literature review highlights previous research on role ambiguity among critical pieces of sport organizations, including non-profit sport organizations and volunteers among these organizations as well as athletes among sports teams. This section is then followed by the methods, results, discussion, and conclusion sections

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Over the course of the past several decades, role ambiguity emerged as a reliable theory within much of the organizational psychology literature (Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Ortqvist & Wincent, 2006; Tubre & Collins, 2000). Since then, applying role ambiguity to other disciplines has branched out to specific managerial industries such as engineering (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Organ & Green, 1974, 1981; Calisir, Gumussoy, & Iskin, 2011), nursing (Chang & Hancock, 2008; Tarrant & Sabo, 2010), and accounting (Kalbers & Cenker, 2008; Marginson, 2006).

Since the development of role ambiguity by Kahn et al (1964), the link between sport and role ambiguity is limited. However, links between stress and burnout (a consequence of role ambiguity) has been addressed in several literary occurrences. For instance, Capel, Sisley, and Desertrain (1987) found that high school basketball coaches experienced low to moderate levels of burnout. These authors were able to conclude that role ambiguity played a part in these levels of burnout. It was not until Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, and Carron (2002) when they utilized role ambiguity in a high school rugby context by proposing four areas where an athlete could be uncertain about their role on the team including scope of responsibilities, the behaviors required to fulfill those responsibilities, how the fulfillment of the responsibilities will be evaluated, and the consequences of not fulfilling the responsibilities. Since Beauchamp's (2002) sport context breakthrough, role ambiguity has been adopted widely throughout sport research with specific sport and role ambiguity topics focusing on athlete roles on teams (Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, & Carron, 2005; Cunningham & Eys, 2007; Reimer, Park, & Hinsz, 2006), athlete satisfaction (Eys, Carron, Bray, & Beauchamp, 2003), and non-profit sport organizations (Doherty & Misener, 2009; Hoye & Doherty, 2011). Even though much of this research applies to athletes, it is additional relatable to the current research of the DOBO. Similar to research related to athletes, the DOBO is part of an organization and role ambiguity can influence organizational effectiveness (Vincer & Loughhead, 2010). Higher levels of ambiguity in understanding one's role with an organization can negatively impact the individual (e.g., athletes), the organization (e.g., sports teams), and the management of these areas.

#### **4.1. Role Ambiguity in Sport Organizations**

In many types of sport organizations, role ambiguity may arise unexpectedly. The possibility of unforeseen tasks may become required and the organization does not have a designated or specialized employee to complete those tasks. Although there is very limited research available on intercollegiate athletic role ambiguity, research focusing on role ambiguity in other types of sport organizations such as non-profits. Many non-profit sport organizations have shifted from relying mainly on volunteers to perform important duties to hiring mostly paid employees to focus these important duties (Thibault, Slack, & Hinings, 1991; Kikulis, Slack, & Hinings, 1992, 1995 a, b). There are several human resource staffing options for non-profit organizations, (1) volunteers, (2) partial volunteers, partial part-time employees, (3) partial volunteers, partial full-time employees, (4) part-time employees, (5) full-time employees. As sport organizations (non-profit or not) the transition from unpaid volunteers to paid employees, or some combination of these structures, may lead to an increase in employee role ambiguity (Doherty, 2005; Merrell, 2000; Sakires et al., 2009; Widmer, 1993). Higher role ambiguity as a result to the conflict between paid staff and volunteers in deciding who would manage certain organizational duties and responsibilities (Kikulis, 2000). Even with this recognition of role ambiguity

among employees, a continued lack of communication of duties and responsibilities are evident in these organizations as volunteers still assume numerous responsibilities with unclear organizational rules, regulations, policies, and procedures (Doherty, 2005; Merrell, 2000; Sakires et al., 2009; Widmer, 1993).

Similar to intercollegiate athletic departments, volunteer sport organizations often have to place increased responsibilities on smaller staffs throughout the course of a competitive season, likely increasing role ambiguity and possibly harming job performance and satisfaction. Schultz and Auld (2006) observed a change in Australian volunteer sport organizations (VSO) where paid employees were being brought in to manage the rising complexities that volunteers were facing. As these VSO's matured in Australia, both paid and volunteer members struggled to adjust to and define new roles within the organization. This study focused on volunteer chairpersons and paid executive officers to observe how clearly roles were defined and what outcomes came from instances where role ambiguity was present. Schultz and Auld (2006) observed higher levels of role ambiguity for executive directors than they did for chairpersons. Since the paid executive director positions were only recently created, this intuitively made sense that executive directors would experience more role ambiguity than chairpersons.

Since numerous amateur sport-governing bodies utilize a high percentage of volunteers, it is extremely important for the success of these organizations to avoid role ambiguity. Sakires, Doherty, and Misener (2009) set out to determine demographic impacts on perceptions of role ambiguity as well as any relationships between role ambiguity and job satisfaction, effort, and organizational commitment. In observing survey results from paid staff and volunteer board members of 57 Canadian provincial sport organizations, Sakires et al (2009) determined that prioritizing expectations was an assumed skill that was combined with knowing what a person is expected to do in a role (scope of responsibilities) and that person also knows how to best fulfill those responsibilities (means-ends knowledge). This study also found that volunteer workers in these primarily voluntary sport organizations experienced low role ambiguity, which could have been due to a number of factors, including employees with higher role ambiguity not staying with the organization and paid officers of these voluntary organizations placing minimal responsibilities on volunteer workers. Demographic data collected by Sakires et al (2009) did not show a significant difference in role ambiguity between males and females, nor did data on position reveal any disparities in role ambiguity between volunteers and paid employees. As hypothesized, the study found a negative relationship between role ambiguity and age, position tenure and organizational tenure, meaning that an employee's role became more defined the longer they were in the organization and, more specifically, in a given role. These results also expounded greatly on different facets of role ambiguity and how their elimination can enhance organizational performance.

#### **4.2. Role Ambiguity Among Athletes on Sport Teams**

Teams often assign player roles to fulfill different functions for the team and the methods by which these roles are determined often vary. It was this idea of player role assignments that Eys, Carron, Beauchamp, and Bray (2005) aimed to identify multiple factors that contributed to role ambiguity among athletes with regard to athlete responsibilities and behavioral responsibilities. In surveying athletes from a variety of sport teams, Eys et al (2005) determined that a lack of instruction from coaches contributed to an athlete's inability to contribute to the team that eventually led to role ambiguity. These authors also found that conflicting communication of potential consequences for not fulfilling team responsibilities was cited as a leading factor of ambiguity among 46% of surveyed athletes, along with a complete lack of communication on the issue (Eys et al., 2005).

On many athletic teams, a more experienced player may step to the forefront and serve in a leadership role for the team, either formally or informally (i.e., verbally or to lead by example). Loughhead, Hardy, and Eys (2006) proposed role ambiguity can play a key role among team leaders. Loughhead et al also suggested leadership characteristics (i.e., formal or informal) can affect other areas of an organization rather than just on the field including the management of the team by the coach, or behaviors of team members off the field of play. In observing both male and female collegiate athletes, Loughhead et al (2005) found that athletes preferred to see a majority of lead teams maintain and develop the leadership role throughout the season, especially when it comes to those who designated leaders (i.e., formally or informally) of the team in task-based functions such as athletic performance on the field of

play. Results also suggested that role ambiguity was reduced over the course of a season as the communication between coaches, players, and leaders improved. Similarly, to the DOBO, understanding their duties in this position may reduce the higher levels of role ambiguity.

Athlete satisfaction, similar to job satisfaction of an employee (e.g., DOBO), has been identified as a characteristic that contributes to levels of role ambiguity on a team. Models such as the Multidimensional Model of Leadership (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980) and the Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1998) were developed to quantify observable relationships between role ambiguity, role clarity, role efficacy, and athlete performance (Beauchamp et al., 2002). Role ambiguity and role clarity were observed by Eys, Carron, Bray, and Beauchamp's (2003) study into how role definitions directly impact athlete satisfaction. After observing past research that linked role ambiguity and satisfaction in other areas such as industrial and organizational psychology, Eys et al (2003) attempted to provide a connection between role ambiguity and athlete satisfaction for the sports industry. The authors assessed athlete satisfaction among university soccer players using Chelladurai and Saleh's (1980) Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (ASQ). The participants consisted of 68 starting players, 29 non-starters (i.e., in-game substitutes) and 4 practice roster players. Results showed that athletes consistently demonstrated a relationship between lower role ambiguity and higher athletic satisfaction. Findings also showed high role ambiguity scores at the beginning of the season, however, did not correlate to low athletic satisfaction scores at the end of the season.

Also utilizing the ASQ, Riemer and Toon (2006) focused on the congruence of perceived and actual leadership roles and how that affects athlete satisfaction among 148 NCAA Division I and II tennis players. Results showed that participants were more inclined to have satisfactory experiences and react positively when democratic leadership behaviors were utilized (i.e. allowing athletes to help plan group goals, tactics, and strategies) as well as social support leadership behaviors (i.e. creating a positive group atmosphere). For an individualized sport like tennis, this makes sense that players would be more satisfied with behaviors that create a group atmosphere as opposed to the isolation of playing in a small group game.

Considering research that progresses the topic of athletic leadership and its effects on athlete satisfaction (Eys, Loughhead, & Hardy, 2007), a study by Vincer and Loughhead (2010) observed the effects of athletic leadership traits on team cohesion. This research focused on team cohesion based on the relationships formed between team members with different roles and the effect of those relationships on organizational performance. Three hundred and twelve Canadian collegiate athletes were studied using the Group Environment Questionnaire (c.f., Carron, Widmeyer & Brawley, 1985) along with athlete leadership behaviors using the Leadership Scale for Sports (c.f., Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). Results uncovered that higher levels of cohesion between athlete leaders and their teams were associated with high levels of training and instruction and social support behaviors, such as task and social behaviors and lower levels of role ambiguity that were identified by Loughhead et al (2006).

#### **4. METHODS**

Role ambiguity affects the progress of teams and organizations. Efforts to recognize moderate to high levels of role ambiguity for an organization and make adjustments to reduce these levels (i.e., clear role descriptions) can be challenging, but necessary. With the limited amount of literature in understanding a popular NCAA Division I position such as the DOBO, the current research utilized the ideas of Kahn et al (1964) and role ambiguity as a foundation to further the understanding of the DOBO. The current research was not intended to solve role ambiguity for the DOBO or within intercollegiate athletic departments, but rather identify the possibilities of role ambiguity as less is known about the position. Upon initial investigation via job descriptions held by the DOBO, individuals take on much of the non-coaching duties associated with NCAA Division I basketball programs. Identifying role ambiguity among DOBOs may also shed light on levels of ambiguity of the DOBO and raise concerns with regard to role ambiguity among other positions in the intercollegiate athletic departments.

DOBO's for both men's and women's basketball teams were targeted and included in the current study. Utilizing the NCAA Division I list of schools with basketball programs (350 men's basketball teams and 351 women's basketball teams), we were able to locate contact information for 439 individuals holding the DOBO position. Participation was voluntary and all 439 DOBO's were

contacted via email to request participation in the study. The email explained research purposes and procedures and how confidentiality would be maintained. If the participant clicked the link to accept to participate in the survey, they were notified that they were providing consent to the research investigators to use the information provided for research purposes. In addition, they were assured that their identity would be removed from the response in order to maintain confidentiality. Email recipients who clicked the link to decline participation were notified that their information would be deleted from the email database and they would not be contacted again for the current research project.

The participants answered questions from the Role Ambiguity Scale (RAS), which was developed by Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, and Carron (2002). A slightly modified version of the RAS was utilized, with some terminology adjusted to better reflect the athletic administrative nature of the DOBO position rather than the athlete perspective. Participants were asked to use a 9-point Likert-type scale system (1-strongly disagree and 9-strongly agree) in order to rate four areas of their DOBO position in regard to role ambiguity. The RAS examined the following areas: scope of responsibilities, role behavior, role evaluation, and role consequences which are all important characteristics in understanding if an individual has feelings of ambiguity in their workplace (Beauchamp et al., 2002). Participants were additionally asked for information related to their specific DOBO job responsibilities, their future career aspirations, and demographics such as age range, salary range, education/degree and years as a DOBO. This information was necessary to collect to build the understanding of the responsibilities of the position due to the limitations of the position in intercollegiate athletic departments.

It should be noted here that each series of questions related to role ambiguity derived by asking the participant if they *understood* their role, while one question in each category asked if participants were *unclear* with their role as a DOBO. This was in line with (Cronbach, 1950) reverse wording method to protect against submissive responses while participants took the survey.

## 5. RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to better understand the DOBO position within the NCAA Division I ranks. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze DOBOs with questions relevant to job responsibilities, career background, career interests and perceptions of their job based on Kahn's et al (1964) foundational elements of role ambiguity.

### 5.1. Demographic Results

There were 163 DOBOs that participated in the study that resulted in a 37% response rate. Of the 163 participants, 99 were male and 64 were female. Table 1 is broken up into several sub-tables to best understand the demographic and career background information regarding the DOBO position. The percentages in Table 1 are based on the 163 participants.

**Table1a.** *Gender Breakdown*

Men	99	51% DOBO for men's team 49% DOBO for women's team
Women	64	3% DOBO for men's team 97% DOBO for women's team

**Table1b.** *Ethnicity Breakdown (n-163)*

African American	17.28%
Asian American	2.47%
Hispanic	1.85%
Caucasian	74.07%
Other	4.32%

**Table1c.** *DOBO Experience (n-163)*

Less than 1 year	6.75%
1-5 years	65.64%
5-10 years	17.79%
10-15 years	7.98%
15+ years	1.84%

**Table1e.** *Geographical Breakdown (n-163)*

New England	3.70%
Mid-East Region	17.90%
Great Lakes Region	16.67%
Plains Region	7.41%
Southeast Region	27.78%
Southwest Region	10.49%
Rocky Mountain Region	4.32%
Far West Region	11.73%

**Table1f.** *Future career aspirations (n-163)*

DOBO	2.52%
College basketball head coach	36.48%
College coaching (e.g., asst. coach)	7.55%
Athletic Admin. (e.g., asst./assoc. AD)	30.82%
Other	5.03%
Unsure at this time	17.61%

## 5.2. Role Ambiguity

From a broad perspective, participants did not report high levels of role ambiguity with men scores ranging from 7.5-8.48 on a 9-point scale (higher score indicated greater role clarity and lower ambiguity). Tables two through five represent findings related to NCAA Division I DOBOs' role ambiguity. In each of these tables, the mean and standard deviation are provided, as well as the mean and standard deviation broken down by the gender of the DOBO. The Beauchamp et al (2002) study suggested that high scores reflected strong representation with regard to role ambiguity and lower scores suggested a lack of a clear understanding of roles. For example, Beauchamp et al (2002) considered levels of success for rugby defensive players with the mean and standard deviation levels of 6.68 and 1.34 respectively. This indicated that rugby players had a clear understanding of their roles on defense.

In tables two through five, descriptive statistics are provided for each of the four scales of the RAS. Relatively high mean scores were noted, which indicated less ambiguity and, in some circumstances, there were also relatively high standard deviations. While these statistics did not indicate a presence of high levels of role ambiguity, the relatively high standard deviations spurred a deeper analysis within the statistics suggesting that there is a likelihood that certain DOBOs that may be unclear about certain aspects of their roles in the position.

**Table2**

<i>Understanding DOBO responsibilities</i>	All participants <u>Mean</u>	All participants <u>SD</u>	Women <u>Mean</u>	Women <u>SD</u>	Men <u>Mean</u>	Men <u>SD</u>
Understand DOBO responsibilities	8.48	0.99	8.52	0.75	8.45	1.12
Understand scope of DOBO responsibilities	8.47	1.01	8.49	0.81	8.46	1.12
Understand all responsibilities as DOBO	8.34	1.00	8.37	1.00	8.33	1.00
Unclear about DOBO responsibilities	2.41	<b>2.24</b>	2.71	<b>2.53</b>	2.20	<b>2.00</b>
Clear about the different responsibilities that make up role as a DOBO	7.94	<b>1.92</b>	8.08	<b>1.78</b>	7.85	<b>2.01</b>

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**Table3**

<i>Behaviors necessary for DOBO</i>	All participants <u>Mean</u>	All participants <u>SD</u>	Women <u>Mean</u>	Women <u>SD</u>	Men <u>Mean</u>	Men <u>SD</u>
Understand what adjustments to behavior need to be made to carry out role as DOBO	8.18	1.18	8.15	1.27	8.21	1.11
Understand the behaviors to perform to responsibilities as a DOBO	8.42	0.82	8.32	0.98	8.49	0.68
Knowing specific behaviors necessary to carry out responsibilities as a DOBO	8.42	0.84	8.35	0.95	8.46	0.76
Clear as to the behaviors needed to perform and fulfill role as a DOBO	8.28	1.08	8.11	1.38	8.40	0.78
Unclear what behaviors are expected in order to carry out role as a DOBO	2.31	<b>2.22</b>	2.34	<b>2.23</b>	2.29	<b>2.21</b>

**Table4**

<i>Understanding of DOBO evaluation</i>	All participants <u>Mean</u>	All participants <u>SD</u>	Women <u>Mean</u>	Women <u>SD</u>	Men <u>Mean</u>	Men <u>SD</u>
I understand the criteria which my role responsibilities are evaluated as a DOBO	8.04	1.29	8.02	1.34	8.06	1.26
I understand how my role is evaluated in my current position as a DOBO	7.97	1.35	8.00	1.32	7.95	1.37
It is clear to me how my role responsibilities are evaluated	7.86	1.45	7.85	1.45	7.87	1.45
I am unclear about the way in which my DOBO role is evaluated	2.68	<b>2.30</b>	2.90	<b>2.57</b>	2.52	<b>2.08</b>



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The criteria by which my DOBO role is evaluated are clear to me	7.5	<b>1.94</b>	7.54	<b>1.90</b>	7.47	<b>1.97</b>
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**Table5**

<i>Understanding consequences of failing to perform duties</i>	All participants <u>Mean</u>	All participants <u>SD</u>	Women <u>Mean</u>	Women <u>SD</u>	Men <u>Mean</u>	Men <u>SD</u>
Clear as to what happens if failure occurs when performing responsibilities	7.98	1.24	8.05	1.23	7.93	1.25
Understand the consequences of failing to carry out responsibilities	8.05	1.29	8.13	1.23	8.00	1.33
Unclear about consequences of failing to carry out responsibilities	2.38	<b>2.07</b>	2.43	<b>2.19</b>	2.35	<b>1.98</b>
Understand consequences of unsuccessful role performance	7.91	1.56	8.05	1.38	7.81	1.66
Understand consequences if responsibilities are not performed	7.91	1.55	7.97	1.38	7.87	1.66

Based on previous research related to role ambiguity (Beauchamp et al., 2002) standard deviations greater than 1.75 would suggest that some DOBO participants did experience ambiguity towards certain areas of their jobs. In each of the tables above, the bolded statistics with higher standard deviations showed that more than 20% of the participants experienced mild to moderate levels of role ambiguity for these questions. While the overall RAS scores of our sample did not reach an adequate level to determine that they experience role ambiguity as a group, it is noteworthy that some of the participants did, in fact, experience moderate levels of ambiguity.

Because the DOBO is not a well-understood position (compared to collegial positions such as the Director of Marketing or the Sports Information Director, additional probing questions about their job responsibilities seemed appropriate to try and gain a better understanding of current DOBO positions. A series of additional questions (represented by Table 6) asked participants about their specific responsibilities and those which they enjoyed. In addition, because anecdotal evidence suggested that the DOBO is primarily an entry-level position; participants were also asked about their future career aspirations (noted in Table 1). Table 6 represents selections of duties and responsibilities related to the DOBO position. DOBOs were asked to select from this list (with write-in options available as well). Table 6 suggests that 93%, 90% (and so on) of the participant population manage team travel and summer camps (respectively).

**Table 6.** *DOBO responsibilities*

	Responsibilities		Enjoyed responsibilities
93%	Team travel	50%	Team travel
90%	Seasonal camp director	26%	Budget
85%	Student/Grad assistant supervisor	26%	Seasonal camp director
85%	Visiting team practice scheduling	24%	Game scheduling
77%	Daily business operations	23%	Team building
76%	Budget	22%	Equipment
67%	Equipment	21%	Student/Grad assistant supervisor
66%	Compliance	20%	Community service
66%	Community service	18%	Daily business operations
59%	Public/Community relations	18%	Recruitment database

## 6. DISCUSSION

Compared to the likes of the athletic director, assistant athletic director, and the head and assistant coaching positions, the DOBO is a newer position within many NCAA Division I athletic departments. Based on the findings of the current study, the DOBO position is largely an entry-level sport management position in which the primary duties are to assist the head coach and assistant coaches with the non-coaching aspects of managing an NCAA Division I basketball program.

The main objectives of the current study were to broadly understand the duties of the DOBO in addition to understanding if DOBOs experience role ambiguity. Role ambiguity theory refers to the absence of well-defined understandings about the actions necessary to complete the tasks for a given position (Kahn, 1964; Sakires et al., 2009). Role ambiguity is an important factor to consider because it can contribute to reduced task efficiency and overall job satisfaction (Hoye & Doherty 2011). Several researchers have suggested that three types of factors might contribute to performance and efficiency: environmental factors, individual factors, and organizational factors. Individuals experiencing role ambiguity may be affected by these factors. Organizational ineffectiveness may result from individuals that experience role ambiguity, as their performance levels are less optimal and others around these individuals may become less productive in their tasks (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; Sakires et al., 2009; Schultz & Auld, 2006).

The results of the current study showed that high levels of role ambiguity were not reported among the sample of DOBOs that participated in the current research. However, it was noteworthy that several questions asked of participants revealed mild to moderate levels of ambiguity for approximately 20% of the sample based on the Beauchamp et al (2002) results of determining role ambiguity of rugby players. Specific areas that showed higher levels of role ambiguity was reported related to lack of clarity towards how one should behave as a DOBO, taking on multiple responsibilities, and clarity on evaluation. Examining the results of the current study further, the higher levels of ambiguity for participants may be due to the fact that, 62% of the sample had less than five years of experience in the position and it seems likely that this was their first job after graduating college. Therefore, the reported role ambiguity may be due to their current position being their first full-time job in an intercollegiate athletic department. In order to help reduce the moderate role ambiguity for DOBO's in the current research, and thus improve job performance, strong communication is recommended between the DOBO and head coach. Similarly, Eys et al (2005) noted that moderate levels of student-athlete role ambiguity were often due to communication gaps between the coach and athlete. In the current DOBO situation, the coach may need to manage their working relationship with the DOBO as if s/he were an athlete to detail the specifics of the job.

While this study did not specifically ask participants if the increasing number of duties and responsibilities played a role in their perceived ambiguity, answers provided by the participants related to their responsibilities revealed that the DOBO position is not a specialized position as multiple tasks are expected in multiple areas of the sport management spectrum. Schultz and Auld (2006) noted that as duties increase for employees their roles became more difficult to define and role ambiguity became more evident. Therefore, the mild to moderate levels of role ambiguity reported in this study may be due to the less specialized position and increasing number of duties placed on the DOBO (c.f., Eys et al., 2005). Aside from the DOBO participants being unclear about how to prioritize their time, it may also be possible that head/assistant coaches are limited in their ability to evaluate DOBOs properly.

In providing information related to DOBO responsibilities, it was clear that the DOBO position is more of an administrative and management position than a coaching position. However, when discussing their future career paths, a large percentage of the male DOBOs indicated that they want to be head coaches (more so than their female counterparts). This data was intriguing and deserved further investigation. At the time of data analysis for this research project, we investigated the background of 120 NCAA Division I head men's basketball coaches and only found 8% who DOBO experience. This would suggest that DOBOs in the current study are not on the certain career path of becoming a head basketball coach, which may play a part in the moderate levels of role ambiguity. DOBOs may realize that they are in a position that may not advance them to the coaching ranks.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The current study provides literary insights into the limited understanding of the DOBO position to provide perspective toward a definition of the position. The director of operations position is becoming common with other intercollegiate athletic department sports such as football and softball. It is possible that duties and responsibilities of director of operations positions vary from one institution to another based on how the head coach defines the position. This may play a function into the challenges that a DOBO experiences in grasping what is expected of them. A better understanding of the position, including the expectations of the superiors of the DOBO (i.e. head coach), would better serve the teams and organizations who employ the DOBO as well as the person who serves in the DOBO role. While the current study did not find evidence of high role ambiguity among the participants, we did find a wide range in responsibilities as well as some very interesting career aspirations that do not line up with the experience gained as a DOBO. While the results showed less regarding ambiguity towards the DOBO position, those that are currently in the position are ambiguous to their own future careers (particularly the male participants), as many of the participants strive to be a college coach, but the likelihood of this occurring is limited. As previous research suggests, to be a coach, there needs to be evidence of coaching experiences on their resume (c.f., Christensen, 2013; Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Gilbert et al., 2006; MacMahon, Baker, & Farrow, 2013) and results of the current study did not suggest coaching experience was evident.

There were several limitations of the current study, the first being the 37% response rate. Even though this response rate would be considered a quality rate for a survey for many research studies, a higher response rate may have produced higher levels of significance toward role ambiguity, of course, the contrary could be true as well. Another limitation involved the bulk of our respondents had served in their role for a short period of time (62% served for 1-5 years as a DOBO). Being that these participants were fairly new to their positions, it is possible that these DOBOs simply had not yet fully learned and understood their duties and responsibilities of their position, especially those that may have only had one or two years of service.

There are several areas of future research that come from the current study. It would be worthwhile to include head/assistant coaches to compare how their expectations for the DOBO lines up with how the DOBO actually sees his/her role. Other positions in the athletic department may find benefits in understanding role ambiguity. The graduate assistant position is a critical position for many teams in an intercollegiate athletic department, a position that may find the individuals having multiple or split roles as a coach of that sport, but also responsible for operational duties. Research could investigate role ambiguity for graduate students for all intercollegiate athletic department teams. Additionally, it would be quite interesting to explore the gender differences in many aspects of the current research including career aspirations and role ambiguity.

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