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## An Ethnographic Study of the Culture of Communication in the Sports Information Office in a Division I-A Athletic Program

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE CULTURE OF COMMUNICATION  
IN THE SPORTS INFORMATION OFFICE  
IN A DIVISION I-A ATHLETIC PROGRAM

By  
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A Dissertation submitted to the  
Department of Sport Management, Recreation Management  
and Physical Education  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded  
Summer Semester, 2004

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To God be the glory for great things He has done. I dedicate this dissertation to our Heavenly Father for providing me with the energy, the knowledge and the desire to complete this monumental task. Only through the power of His strength was I able to persevere through the long hours at the keyboard.

The dissertation is also dedicated to the two wonderful women in my life -- my mother Mary and my loving wife Katie -- who sacrificed so much of themselves to allow me to chase this dream. I hope and pray I can return the love one day.

This paper is also devoted to all sports information directors who labor in virtual obscurity while performing a difficult, yet critically important job within the intercollegiate athletic program. The next time a millionaire coach or athletic director says SID's are the most overworked and underpaid employees in college athletics, I encourage every SID to tell them to "put their money where their mouth is."

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I entered Florida State University in the fall of 2000, I had virtually no idea how rigorous, yet fulfilling the pathway to the doctorate would become. Many, many individuals gave of their time, expertise and love to assist and push me through to the finish line.

I am grateful to Dr. Aubrey Kent, my major professor, for providing the intellectual foundation of the dissertation. His insight, positive spirit and willingness to take on a new methodology, encouraged me greatly while developing this project. I am thankful for the many hours he invested in helping me learn a new way to study SID's.

I'd also like to thank Dr. Michael Mondello, who was my mentor and friend and also introduced me to the real world of research. Thanks for your guidance, your foresight, and most of all, for exposing me to the delights of the Moore Center.

Dr. Cecile Reynaud has been a friend and volleyball compatriot for many years, and I will always be thankful for her leadership, her wit, and for her being a constant in my life whether it be at the 1996 Olympics in Athens, Georgia, or at Florida State providing the needed impetus and encouragement to 'get it done'.

I was blessed to find an adviser/friend like Dr. Davis Houck to "steer the ship" so to speak. He directed me into the world of ethnography and the enlightening discovery that what I really wanted to study was the cultural nature of the sports information director. Thanks for your humor, your insight and deep interest in the subject.

My FSU 'family' was an indispensable component in the daily dose of fun, hilarity, and nonsense that exemplified the 'mature groups' student life. Special thanks to my brothers Clark Haptonstall, Sam Todd and Jim Brody (who personally carried me through stats), and to my sisters Bosmat Makover and Elfie Farchmin, and my sister in Christ, Letrice Young, who helped pray us all through this experience.

My special thanks go to assistant athletic director/SID Rob Wilson and the sports information staff at Florida State University for their incredible devotion to our profession, and for providing background information for the pilot study and the initial stimulus for the dissertational study. The spark that ignited my fire to study SID's was the termination of one of the nation's best SID's, John Humenik, by the University of Florida. I can't say thanks for that, but that incident was the singular factor that made me realize that further scholarly study was needed on sports information directors.

I also would like to thank Mark Helms and the members of my Sunday school class at Thomasville Road Baptist Church in Tallahassee, who helped pray me through many demanding moments during my tenure at FSU. God will bless you all.

And finally, to Katie, Julianna and Robby ... your love, patience and willingness to hear one more "it's almost done" will be forever ingrained in my heart. Thanks for being the best family a man could ever have!

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## ABSTRACT

The dawning of the “Communication Age” (Lull, 2002), which is the efficient transmission of digitized bits and bytes and also the significance of the entire communication process for ‘real people,’ stimulates two questions: is modern society engrossed in communicating primarily with technology, and has face-to-face communication become obsolete?

Contextualizing these digital age questions into intercollegiate athletics, the purpose of the study was to discover what elements synthesize to form the culture of communication in the Division I-A sports information office. An extensive ethnographic study was utilized to ‘crack the code’ of communication in the SID office. Drawing upon heuristics, or the intense personal experience of the researcher as a framework, this sport ethnography used in-depth participant observation and interviews to discover the verbal, non-verbal and technological communication methods, and also examined the artifacts and rituals of the SID.

An ethnography of communication is the application of ethnographic methods to the communication patterns of a group (Littlejohn, 1999). Three theoretical areas were explored in the literature review: 1) communication theory, 2) how sport culture is created and evolves, and 3) how an ethnography of communication is defined and how it was implemented to conduct the study.

Sands (2002, p. 150) stated, “sport reflects culture and culture reflects sport.” In his book *Sport Ethnography*, Sands argued that sport has become a dominant part of contemporary human society. He posited, “sport is pervasive and never ceasing, casting giant shadows on other facets of life.”

Five thematic areas of SID culture were identified at the conclusion of the study: 1) Office space fostered a culture of separation, 2) verbal communication was sporadic, rushed and a culture of avoidance was prominent, 3) electronic communication was the preferred method the SID’s used to communicate with each other and the outside world, confirming a major paradigmatic shift in SID culture, 4) non-verbal communication methods were used as interpersonal defense mechanisms, and 5) the analysis of SID rituals and artifacts showed a culture of

production, an expectation of immediacy in job performance, paper culture vs. electronic technology and a culture of virtual anonymity for SID's.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The dawning of the “Communication Age” (Lull, 2002), which is the efficient transmission of digitized bits and bytes and also the significance of the entire communication process for ‘real people,’ stimulates several questions: Has the communicative culture of modern society become engrossed in communicating mainly with technology? Have our symbolic exchanges facilitated by high technology and new networks of ‘complex connectivity’ (Tomlinson, 1999) become the primary expressions of basic human communication? Has real face-to-face human contact become obsolete and “transmogrified into seamless robotic conversations with databanks somewhere in cyberspace?” (Lull, 2002, p. 1).

Within the context of intercollegiate athletics, little is known about the communication patterns existing for the primary purveyor of athletic communications – the sports information director (SID). In order to discover how the SID communicates within the framework of their work environment, an optimal method – whether it is with technology or with verbal and non-verbal ways – will be utilized in this dissertation. A participant observation based study, backed with extensive interviews with the various constituents that interact with the SID will be developed to discover the communications culture of a NCAA Division I-A university.

Several definitions of culture abound. Spradley (1980) defined culture as the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior. When ethnographers study other cultures, they must deal with three fundamental aspects of the human experience: What people do, what people know, and the things people make and use. When members of a group share these, we speak of

them as *cultural behavior, cultural knowledge, and cultural artifacts*. An intensive effort will be made to distinguish between the three in this study.

Goodenough (1971, p. 21-22) called culture a collection of behavior patterns and beliefs that constitutes “standards for deciding what is, standards for deciding what can be, standards for deciding how one feels about it, standards for deciding what to do about it, and standards for deciding how to go about doing it.” Through the examination of the behaviors of individuals in the sports information office, the daily communicative interactions, both interpersonal and technological, a look at the knowledge they possess and how they acquire it from each other, and a complete appraisal of the artifacts they produce, should reveal a clear picture of the culture of the SID office.

Sands (2002, p. 150) stated “sport reflects culture and culture reflects sport.” In his book *Sport Ethnography*, Sands argued that sport has become a dominant part of contemporary human society. He noted many cultural anthropologists dismiss the study of sport culture as being trivial with regard to the overall study of human behavior, which is routed through religion, economic or political systems, or even language. He posited, “sport is pervasive and never ceasing, casting giant shadows on other facets of life. For a culture, a world to go crazy over a ball game, a camel race, a lacrosse match, a run, speaks volumes about human behavior” (p. 150).

Sands (2002) posed the following question: Why have we become maniacal over a collection of athletes participating in ritually patterned behavior, repeated over and over down through the ages? It could be surmised that sport has become a major part of modern culture when examined through a social, political or economical lens. The fanaticism and massive financial investment in sport reflects the major role sport plays in world culture in our postmodern society.

Communication is highly pervasive in our society, and is an important, yet complex aspect of human life (Littlejohn, 1999). It is central to all human experience, separates us from other animals because of our ability to communicate at a higher level, and helps create meaning in our everyday experiences (Littlejohn, 1999). Because the process of communication is so complex, a precise definition is

arguably impossible to put forward. Dance and Larson (1976) listed 126 different definitions of communication in *The Functions of Human Communication: A Theoretical Approach*. Clevenger (1991) stated that the problem in defining communication for scholarly or scientific purposes stems from the fact that the verb 'to communicate' is well established in the common lexicon and therefore not easily captured for scientific use. It is one of the most overused terms in the English language (Clevenger, 1991).

Littlejohn (1999) organized the many genres of communication into a five-part model. This model includes structural and functional theories, or those that designate the belief that social structures are real and function in ways that can be observed objectively. These focus on social and cultural structures. Second is cognitive and behavioral theories, which are a combination of two academic disciplines, which shares similar characteristics --- Cognitivism recognizing the stimulus-response link in communication, and behaviorism, which was the term used for this area of study until the 1960's, but today has evolved into cognitivism. Third is interactionist theories, which view social life as a process of interaction, which some believe is the most important part of communication theory because it allows social structures to exist. Fourth are interpretive theories, which attempts to discover meaning from actions and texts. Finally, critical theories are a loose collection of ideas that focus on issues of inequality and oppression.

For the purpose of this dissertation, the cognitive theories relating to the social and cultural structures of the communication process will be the primary focus. Information theory is an important conceptual frame for the study of emergent communication patterns within college athletics. On a basic level, information theory is concerned with the transmission and reception of messages, rather than the meaning of the message. Information begins with entropy, or randomness, or lack of organization in a situation (Littlejohn, 1999). Information is similar to entropy because it is a measure of uncertainty; the more the uncertainty, the greater amount of information is necessary. When a situation is completely predictable, or negentropy, there is no information present.



A central tenet in communication research is the basic model of transmission by Shannon and Weaver (1949) (See Figure 1). In this model, the *source* formulates or selects a *message*, consisting of signs to be transmitted. The *transmitter* converts the message into a set of *signals* that are sent over a *channel* to a *receiver*. The receiver converts the signals into a message (Littlejohn, 1999).

The Shannon and Weaver (1949) model can be used in many contexts. A television message is a prime example according to Littlejohn (1999). The producers, directors, and announcers are the source; the message is transmitted by airwaves (channel) to the TV set, which converts electromagnetic waves back into a visual impression for the viewer (Littlejohn, 1999). Pertinent to this paper is the example in interpersonal communication where the speaker's brain is the source, the vocal system the transmitter, and the air medium the channel. The listener's ear is the receiver, and the listener's brain the destination (Littlejohn, 1999).

Five trait theories provide background support to identify the methods by which communication patterns emerge in college athletics. Communication apprehension, rhetorical sensitivity, communicator style, aggression and equivocation theory are the primary concepts that help frame the traits individuals use to produce messages.

Norton (1983) identified nine variables that define the communication style of an individual. Dominance, dramatic behavior, contentiousness, animation, impression leaving, relaxation, attentiveness, openness, and friendliness, were listed. He clarifies that a great deal of overlap exists between each of these variables and that a person rarely communicates using one of these styles alone. Aggression is another communicative variable that can influence the management relationship in the superior-subordinate dyad.

Schutz (1966) defined the basic way we as humans can meet our interpersonal needs through interpersonal communication. Each interpersonal relationship is based upon affection, inclusion, and control. Brooks and Emmert (1976) said that interpersonal communication is one of the basic human activities we engage in every day – following breathing, eating, sleeping, and reproducing. They go one step further saying it could be more important than eating and reproducing

because we cannot engage in those two acts unless we have mastered interpersonal communication.

The development of relationships, according to Knapp and Miller (1994), are at the heart of interpersonal communication. By way of definition, Knapp and Miller said that a relationship is a set of expectations two people have for their behavior based on the pattern of interaction between them. Sigman (1998) presented three behavioral orders of human communication that frame the discussion of interpersonal communication in relationships. These are interaction, social, and semiotic orders. Interaction consists of codes that enable communicators to enter, maintain, and exit both focused and unfocused interaction (Goffman, 1963, 1972). The social order is composed of those rules for the use of behavior to construct, maintain, and modify identities, relational groupings, and institutional affiliations. The semiotic order covers the structure of each communication channel, or the codes that establish grammatical and ungrammatical utterances or performances of a particular channel (Sigman, 1998). Each of these orders partially overlaps and interacts to help define the communication in interpersonal relationships.

The subjects of this cultural communicative study are the sports information personnel whose mission is to promote and publicize the intercollegiate athletic program at their institution or organization (Davis, 1978). Within that broad job description, the SID must master a diverse set of technical skills like gathering, producing, and disseminating news, generating publicity, publications design and production, (Davis, 1978; Michaels, 1993). They also must maintain relations with external publics like boosters, media, and other faculty and staff (Helitzer, 1996). It is important to develop a comprehensive understanding of the SID's many public relations responsibilities to understand what the work culture of the SID office is like.

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) defined public relations as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994, p. 34). Public relations has different meanings for different people. Cutlip's definition is the most widely accepted version of the term 'PR' as a management function, but 472 others have been mentioned

(Harlow, 1976). PR is also known as public affairs, public information, communications, community relations or promotion (McCleneghan, 2000).

Stoldt (1998) noted the majority of what has been written on sports information directors has been mostly anecdotal. He stated the development of theory in sport management has not extended into the area of sport public relations, and that establishing a strong theoretical base with which to study the SID profession is essential in higher education institutions. Recent studies (McCleneghan, 2000; Stoldt, 2000), have shown the majority of research conducted on sports information directors has centered on the four-step communicative role typology model developed by Broom and Smith (1979) and McCroskey and Richmond's (1982, 1987, and 1993) four-trait communication scale model. These constructs examined where SID's are placed in the management structure of an athletic department based upon their communication skills (Stoldt, 1998). Three implications that emerged from a study conducted by Stoldt, Miller, & Comfort (2001) help define where the SID office is placed within the overall culture of college athletics. This information should prove useful in describing how SID's view themselves within the overall athletic program structure. First, athletic directors viewed the SID as a practitioner, rather than a media professional. Second, AD's valued the SID's technical abilities more than their ability to perform managerial tasks. Third, the AD's most important concern for the future in college athletics was the use of the Internet. These findings indicate a discrepancy between the desired role of the SID and the role the AD assigns to the SID in the structure of the athletic department. Knowing there is a limited framework to evaluate the communication function in college athletics, a thorough, in-depth ethnographic study of the culture inside a sports information office could present one method to evaluate this unique sport sub-culture.

### Problem Statement

Communication is a complex expression that is the focus of many studies in modern society. The addition of modern technological devices like personal computers, cellular telephones, and the Internet, have made the examination of this

subject even more convoluted. The transfer of the study of communication to the field of sport management is the primary purpose of this dissertation. This study will focus on the primary purveyors of communication in college athletics – the sports information directors.

These complex problems have not been explored in the context of intercollegiate athletics in the United States, and a negligible amount of scholarly research on sports information directors (SID) has been conducted. Because of society's fanatical interest in the college game, a study of the communication behaviors in an SID office could provide answers to the questions relating to the verbal and electronic communication in college athletics. To help close this knowledge gap, the purpose of this dissertation will be to examine the culture of communication that emerges from daily interactions in the sports information office at Southeastern State University (SSU), a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I-A football-playing institution. These will be used to assess whether the communication issues of modern society have reached the gatekeepers of access to the inner workings of intercollegiate athletics, e.g. the sports information directors.

To facilitate the accrual of new information on communication in college athletics, an ethnographic methodology will be employed to obtain answers regarding the culture of the SSU sports information office. A naturalistic, or 'discovery oriented' phenomenological inquiry, where the research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest (Guba, 1978, Dobbert, 1982, Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), is the methodological approach chosen for this study. Geertz' (1973) concept of 'going native' and providing 'thick description' of the observed group is central to the study of the SID's. They will be observed in their natural work environment and the intentions, motives, beliefs, rules, and values of the group will be observed. Denzin (1978) noted that the primary goal of naturalism is to capture the culture from within and understand it. By living close to the culture, the outside observer can acquire a certain objectivity to better interpret the behaviors of the group. The

existence of specific communicative cultural patterns within the SID office will be the outcome of the research.

Several communication processes will be observed and evaluated in the SID study. The study of language, both verbal and non-verbal, spoken and written in this sports context, is one facet. Communicative interactions between the entire SID staff will frame the primary section of the dissertation. Additionally, the researcher will look at the technology used to by the staff to communicate, leadership issues, and tensions that arise due to office space limitations, excessive overtime, and stress. The artifacts produced by the staff, ranging from press releases, media guides and website updates, to press passes and photography, will be observed, along with staff rituals and traditions.

In summary, the goal of the study is to observe the daily operations of the office, how the staff interacts with each other and attempt to 'crack the code' of the communication culture in the SID office. The examination of athletic rituals and traditions practiced by the SID office at this large football playing institution should provide rich data on the culture of sports information. At the conclusion of the study, it is hoped that the researcher will be able to make recommendations to the subject group, and to other major university sports information offices about the effectiveness of the communication patterns of SID's.

### Theoretical Framework

The selection of a theoretical framework to examine the culture of communication inside the SSU sports information office is a matter of what Patton (2002) called "methodological appropriateness." He noted that different methods are appropriate for different research situations. For this dissertation, a phenomenological, naturalistic approach will be utilized because of the researcher's profound interest in discovering a realistic view of the communicative culture of the sports information office. The method of choice to accomplish this research objective was an intensive ethnographic study where the researcher goes inside the group to observe and evaluate the everyday behaviors, interactions and artifacts produced by the subjects.

To thoroughly examine this phenomenon, an understanding of how culture is defined and how it develops, more specifically that of sport culture, will be presented. This dissertation will also include an evaluation of communication theories that explain the processes and the importance of human communication in the development of relationships in the context of the sports information office.

A three-month ethnographic study will be used to collect and analyze data inside the Southeastern State University sports information office. A heuristic approach in phenomenological research, where the researcher draws upon intense personal experience to frame the examination of the target group, will be utilized in the study. This naturalistic sport ethnography will make use of participant observation and interviews, along with a complete analysis of the printed artifacts and technological methods of communication, to produce an insider's view of the culture of the SSU sports information office.

The primary focus of this dissertation is the development of the sports information office sub-culture in intercollegiate athletics. To accomplish a thorough conception of this special sport culture, an understanding of the nature of culture must first occur. Second, an assessment of how sport has transformed into a major component of modern day culture must be presented. Finally, the debate between postmodernists who believe the word culture should not even be used in modern research because of the dilution of the word's meaning and overuse by mainstream media, versus traditionalists who hold to the premise that culture is learned behavior through being part of a culture expressed in the customs, habits, and practices (Sands, 2002), which can only be evaluated through close observation of the group.

The open-ended nature of qualitative research stimulates the debate over why a naturalistic ethnography is preferable over the more traditional form used by populist researchers, who invoke the scientific method for the testing of theories (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). A working comprehension of these two theoretical structures is essential before selecting one to conduct the study. Additionally, an explanation of two other qualitative frameworks – interpretivism and postmodernism, will be presented to help the researcher comprehend the intense debate over modern ethnographic research.

At the core of ethnographic research is the idea of beginning a study without any preconceived theories or notions. Denzin (1978) noted that the primary goal of naturalism is to capture the culture from within and understand it. The search for universal laws (theories) is downplayed in favor of detailed accounts of the concrete experience of life within a particular culture (Denzin, 1978). The naturalist resists imposed schemes or models, which over-simplify the complexities of everyday life (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Devotion to the study participants, not the blind subscription to a particular set of methodological principles no matter how strongly supported by philosophical arguments, is central to naturalism (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Positivists would argue the stimulus-response model is sufficient to interpret human behavior. Patton (2002) noted that quantitative and experimental research methods are used to generate and test hypothetical-deductive generalizations. The advantages of this research are parsimony, precision, and ease of analysis (Patton, 2002). Ethnographic researchers who utilize positivistic theory see themselves as passive observers, with the narrative taking on a third-person voice that minimizes the emotion and passion of fieldwork (Sands, 2002). The goal of positivistic ethnography is to re-create a representation of cultural reality that is close to what the culture perceives (Sands, 2002). A discussion about the reason for fieldwork follows, and positivists believe they should determine a theory of the behavior of the culture following collection of data.

Interpretivism, championed by Clifford Geertz, is another theoretical method to study the difference between generalized human behavior and a more specific cultural behavior. Geertz believed that every culture is unique and beyond adaptations to the environment that may produce similarity between cultures. Each culture has its own behaviors, beliefs, values, morals and worldviews, but the overall culture is manifested through the use of symbols, which are understood through the expression of social behavior (Sands, 2002). All social interaction is symbolic, and meaning is derived from how these symbols are constructed and put to use. Participants involved in the interactions that produce meaning cannot explain how they know the meaning of the behaviors, but they consistently act in ways that

others can understand and interpret (Sands, 2002). The interpretation of culture is trying to understand a culture's way of life (or, its *cultural reality* according to Sands). Malinowski, followed by Geertz and others, said that ethnography is an attempt at seeing culture through the "eyes of the native" – and what Geertz also said, figuring out "what the devil they think they are up to" (Geertz, 1983, p. 58).

Postmodernism, a recent phenomenon in academic and social sciences has stimulated a lively debate by challenging the normative science and its objectivity, its use of traditional means of establishing authority, and its use of such terms as validity and reliability (Sands, 2002). Sands (p. 85) stated postmodernism is a catch all label referring to many things: movement in the arts, new forms of social theory (feminist theory, queer theory, and other post-modern expressions such as race and ethnicity), the demise of colonialism since World War II, cultural life under late capitalism, and current life in a 'mass mediated' world in which the symbol for reality has replaced reality (Denzin, 1997, p. 263, cited in Sands, 2002). Postmodernists like George Marcus, Michael Fisher, and James Clifford, worked to replace the central feature of positivism – the accumulation of knowledge – with a position that knowledge is relative and context based. They believe in exorcising positivism from ethnography because it embodies the "conservative practices of the traditional, hegemonic ethnographic order (Denzin, 1997, p. 251, cited in Sands, 2002). Postmodernists like Denzin and Lincoln use ethnography to raise social awareness and strike back against a capitalistic hegemonic social order, "a radical democratic social practice" (Denzin, 1997, p. 287, cited in Sands, 2002).

A primary difference between the bi polar theories of interpretivism and postmodernism is the use of *reflexivity* – or how the ethnographer's role in fieldwork and their cultural background -- affects the ethnography, (Sand, 2002). Both methods acknowledge that the ethnographer plays a central role in the production of fieldwork and the resulting narrative text. Geertz and others like Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens believed that the ethnographer's reflexivity was used to understand their role in understanding their behavior in terms of the ethnographer's cultural reality (Sands, 2002). Geertz recognized that the ethnographer must attempt a difficult feat – becoming an insider while simultaneously maintaining an



analytical distance to process cultural information (Sands, 2002). He found that the ethnographer was negotiating with informants and that the ethnography was a somewhat fictional text. At this point, Geertz accepted that the researcher became part of the process of ethnography, and the term reflexivity came into prominent use (Sands, 2002).

Geertz and his colleagues believed the researcher could interpret culture only by becoming deeply immersed in the culture, and eventually, learning to interpret the cultural reality through an understanding of its symbols, meanings and behaviors (Sands, 2002). In sharp contrast, postmodernists do not want to become totally immersed in a culture. They refused to become a cultural member; they refused extensive participation with the group and remained neutral, distant observers, preferring to interpret culture from a distance. Marcus (1999) noted that postmodern ethnographers are nomadic fieldworkers who follow a multisided research strategy. In essence, they believe cultural meaning can only be formed by collecting data at different locations and building collective view of culture from the viewpoint of several identities that are reforming and reshaping seemingly on a daily basis (Marcus, 1999).

Due to the conflict between these varied theoretical frameworks in ethnography, Sands (2002) warns of a problem in cultural studies: what does the data represent or mean, and whose cultural reality is represented in the final text — the cultural members', the ethnographer's, or a mixed, negotiated reality created with the addition of the ethnographer?

The purpose of this research is not to prove or explain a theory, but to rather observe the SID office from the inside to discover how this unique sports culture communicates. The value of this type of research is great to explain how the primary communicators at one of the United States' predominate football-playing institutions create a culture of communication with their internal and external publics. Although the value of theory is great, for this study, the opportunity to observe, evaluate and analyze this particular group is rare and will be beneficial to the sports public relations profession as a whole.

Another theoretical framework of the study is a heuristic approach, which places great value on the personal experience of the researcher because it allows them to have a deep insight into the phenomenon through shared experience and a familiarity with the environment studied. The practical experience of the researcher in the sports information industry will be beneficial in observing and analyzing the full culture of this unique group of communicators.

Finally, an understanding of communication theory is also necessary to explore the communicative interactions, both verbal and non-verbal, between the participants in the study. A deeper comprehension and explanation these theories will help the researcher discover the communicative culture of the sports information personnel, through their interactions, interpersonal relationships, and daily work experience.

The Communication Age and the 'sportification of society' (Crum, 1992) have set into motion a paradigmatic shift in how our society views sports. This study will present an accumulation of information that will explain how communication occurs inside a renowned intercollegiate sport culture.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this section is to present a review of the literature pertaining to the variables in this study of the communicative culture in the SSU sports information office. The review is divided into thirteen sections which include: (1) the definition and creation of culture; (2) the development of sport culture; (3) a culture of communication; (4) ethnography of communication; (5) sport ethnography; (6) communication theory; (7) interpersonal communication; (8) sports information directors; (9) CoSIDA; (10) theory development in the study of SID's; (11) role typology framework; (12) variables affecting SID job performance; and (13) perceptions of SID's by AD's.

#### Toward an Understanding of Culture

Shaped in the tradition of anthropology, ethnography is “devoted to describing the ways of life of humankind ... a social scientific description of a people and the cultural basis of their peoplehood” (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 38). The guiding principle of ethnography is that any group of people who interact together over a period of time will evolve into a culture. Williams (1962, cited in Lull, 1995, p. 66) provided a definition of culture as:

“Culture is a particular way of life, shaped by values, traditions, beliefs, material objects and territory.” It is complex and dynamic ecology of people, things, worldviews, activities, settings that fundamentally endures but is also changed in routine communication and social interaction. Culture is context. It's how we talk and dress, the food we eat, and how we prepare and consume it, the gods we invent, the ways we worship them, how we divide up

time and space, how we dance, values to which we socialize our children, and all the other details that make up everyday life.”

The study of culture is the desire to observe and record the behavior patterns, beliefs and traditions deeply rooted in a people (Spradley, 1980; Patton, 2002, Sands, 2002). Spradley (1980) further defines culture as the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior. When ethnographers study other cultures, they must deal with three fundamental aspects of the human experience: What people do, what people know, and the things people make and use. When members of a group share these, we speak of them as *cultural behavior*, *cultural knowledge*, and *cultural artifacts*. An intensive effort will be made to distinguish between the three in this study.

Early ethnographers like Boas and Malinowski collected evidence to support the cause of differentiation between humans – in diverse beliefs and practices – was caused by social learning, not biology as was held by early biological determinists who supported the principles of Darwinism (Sands, 2002). These early researchers generated theories that humanity shared common beliefs and principles, and this propelled the development of ethnography. This contrasted with the beliefs of missionaries and colonial administrators that held tribal societies were primitive, prisoner to customs and traditions that held them in a cultural jail. Native cultures were seen as holistic and sharply bounded entities (Sands, 2002). These long-standing tribal cultural practices were to be replaced through a process called syncretism (changes and modifications), (Sands, 2002). However, the findings of later ethnographic research discovered that many of these native cultural practices did not die out despite the efforts of zealous colonial administrators.

Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict followed Boas and Malinowski in producing a vast amount of ethnographic studies about the orderly, predictable customs and practices of non-Western, or tribal, societies (Sands, 2002). Through the process of spending vast amounts of time with foreign peoples learning their language and customs, ethnographers developed the concept of *cultural relativism* (Sands, 2002). This relativism was bounded in not making quick judgments on

different behaviors and customs observed, but rather considering deeply the role and customs of the people. This became the hallmark of modern day ethnography.

Culture is an abstract concept that can be understood in terms of a 'mentalistic' formula applied to comprehend the groups (Sands, 2002). However, Sands maintained this formula is calculated differently from group to group. Three different methods are presented to define it: 1) idealism; 2) realism, and 3) a cognitively based concept of culture. Idealism refers to a heritage of ideas that transcend people, place, and time (Sands, 2002). These ideas include behaviors, habits, customs, and beliefs, which function as a shared knowledge members of a group can access. Each generation captures and subsequently passes them on to the next. According to Sands, this complex abstraction of ideas is summed into a knowledge bundle, translated into mental representations, and then used in cultural behaviors like ritual, cultural practices, and public opinion. This sum is shared and used by the entire group, and the process consensus by the members defines the culture. The American Heritage College Dictionary (Pickett, 2002, p. 346) supports this idea of a summation of culture by calling it the *totality* of socially transformed behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought." Realism is the notion of acquired habits, customs, and institutions, and what is important to realists is how these processes are learned. Aunger (1999, p. 100) says that realists "track the lived histories," of the cultural representations. In other words, ethnographers attempt to find out why evolution, or cultural selection (picking or choosing a specific belief over another), or any other cultural manifestation takes place. The process of uncovering how the cultural learning takes place is of interest to this cultural form.

Sands (2002) concluded both idealism and realism are interested in what makes up culture, how cultural knowledge is passed on, and how representations that exist in the minds of cultural members can be depicted from the cultural behavior and material artifacts observed by the ethnographer.

D'Andrade, 1995, cited in Sands, 2002, p. 51) brings to the forefront a final process to evaluate this complex topic. He described it as a "culture of the head." Current definitions of culture explore the viewpoint that the origination of culture is in

the mind. Sand noted how we 'culture-bearing humans' access our surroundings and turn that information into representations plays a large role in guiding ethnography. The only way to discover what this mental concept of culture includes is to observe the representations and symbols that are expressed in the group's cultural interaction and behavior. Thus, the goal of ethnography is to understand what's 'in the head' by observing and experiencing the symbolic, behavioral, and material representations of that culture (Sands, 2002).

An important distinction to be stated is that the visible and mentalistic symbols and rituals of cultural members exist in what Sands called a "knowledge tank" (p. 52). The ethnographer is concerned with observing those behaviors and icons and attempting to explain their real meaning. By capturing those meanings through intense scrutiny inside the culture, a true understanding of the culture of the group can be obtained.

Spradley (1980) provided a vivid example of how cultural interpretations can differ from group to group. In this example, a group of police officers in Hartford, CT were trying to save a heart attack victim using heart massage and oxygen. A crowd of 75-100 mostly Spanish-speaking residents, unfamiliar with CPR techniques, attacked them. The police tried to explain to the crowd that they were trying to save the woman's life; the crowd thought they were beating the woman. Despite the policemen's efforts, the woman died at the scene. The analysis of this scenario reveals that the members of two dissimilar groups observed the same event, but their *interpretations* were drastically different. The crowd used their cultural knowledge to a) interpret the behavior of the policeman as cruel, and b) to act on the woman's behalf to put a stop to what they perceived as brutality. The groups had acquired cultural principles for acting and interpreting things in this way through a particular shared experience. The policemen, on the other hand, used their cultural knowledge to a) interpret the woman's condition as heart failure and their own behavior as life saving and b) give her cardiac massage and oxygen. They used artifacts like an oxygen mask and ambulance. The two groups each had elaborate cultural rules for interpreting the experience, and for acting in emergency situations, and the conflict arose because these cultural rules were so different. This example

points out the importance of the relationship between the correct interpretation of knowledge, behavior and artifacts.

Rysbski (1974) said people learn their culture by making inferences. We use three types of information to make inferences: 1) we observe human behavior; 2) we observe things people make and use (cultural artifacts); and 3) we listen to what people say (speech messages). Making inferences involves reasoning from evidence (what we perceive) or from premises (what we assume). Children acquire their culture by watching and listening to adults and then making inferences about the cultural rules for behavior; with the acquisition of language, the learning accelerates. In a new situation, we have to make inferences about what people know. In fieldwork, you constantly make inferences from what people say, from the way they act, and from the artifacts they use. At first, each cultural inference is only a hypothesis, but when each hypothesis is tested over and over, the ethnographer can be certain that people share a particular system of cultural meanings. None of the three (above) are foolproof, but together they can lead to an adequate cultural description. Rysbski (1974) supported D'Andrade's supposition that to get to know the culture of a people we must "get inside their heads." He uses the example of studying glider pilots in Minnesota. He stated we see them land and take off, but if we want to find out what people know, we must get close to the culture. It wasn't difficult for the pilots when they learned their culture and became "native actors." Learning culture in this manner, according to Rysbski, should not be impossible, but it does require intensive study.

Another way to understand culture is to discover its themes. Ethnographic research, according to Spradley (1980), proceeds on two levels at the same time: keeping track of the small details and at the same time seeks to chart the broader features of the cultural landscape. This sense of the whole is what Spradley calls the "inventory approach." We can identify all the different domains of a culture perhaps dividing them into categories. A simple listing is necessary, but it is not sufficient. We have to go beyond the listings, to discover cultural themes.

Morris Opler (1945) introduced the term *cultural theme* while studying Apache culture. He proposed we could better understand the general pattern of a culture by

identifying recurring themes. Theme was defined as “a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in society” Opler, 1945, p. 198). The concept of theme has its roots in the idea that cultures are more than bits and pieces of custom. Rather, every culture is a complex pattern. Benedict (1934, cited in Spradley, 1980) was the first to apply this idea of patterns to cultures. She noted in a study of American Indians that certain patterns emerged to define the culture. Her contribution was that every cultural scene is more than a jumble of parts; it consists of a system of meaning that is integrated into some kind of larger patterns with concepts as values, value-orientations, core values, core symbols, premises, ethos, eidos, worldview and cognitive orientation.

Spradley (1980, p. 141) defined a cultural theme as “any principle recurrent in a number of domains, explicit or tacit, and serving as a relationship among subsystems of cultural meaning.” An understanding of the difference between the concepts of tacit and explicit is necessary. *Explicit culture* is a level of knowledge that people can communicate about with relative ease. Explicit themes are those that are much more overt and are spoken aloud so that everyone can understand the meaning. The press box culture at SSU, for example, with its viewing of countless football games on television monitors, paper, announcements, statistics, and talk of tailbacks, wide receivers, and defensive ends, is explicit in the cultural world of sports. *Tacit culture*, or a large portion of our cultural knowledge remains outside our awareness, is another concept of importance to the ethnographer. Tacit themes are those that are not spoken, but rather implied or inferred from actions or statements of the subjects (American Heritage College Dictionary, Pickett, 2002, p. 1402). Spradley (1980) noted most cultural themes stay at the tacit level and the researcher must make many inferences on the culture only through careful examination. In his study of glider pilots, Rybski (1974) discovered complex soaring terminology that the pilots used to communicate with each other. To the outside observer, this tacit terminology would be indiscernible without extensive study. Malinowski (1922, cited in Spradley, 1980, p. 47) provided this explanation of tacit knowledge: “The native takes his fundamental assumptions for granted, and if he



reasons or inquires into matters of belief, it would be always in regard to details and concrete applications. The ethnographer must draw the generalizations for himself; must formulate the abstract statement without the help of a native informant.”

Describing the relationships among the parts of a culture is another way to the domain of the culture (Spradley, 1980). By examining the relationships between the subjects, a way to identify yet another piece of the sports cultural picture arises. Spradley (1980, p. 152) provided six ways to search for universal cultural themes p. 152: 1) social conflict; 2) cultural contradictions; 3) informal techniques of social control; 4) managing impersonal social relationships; 5) acquiring and maintaining status; and 6) solving problems.

Sands (2002) stated the contextual meaning of culture has changed in the last 50 years. He posits that culture used to possess a broad, holistic meaning that referred to large segments of people (African, European, or Western culture, for example). This broad homogeneous view of culture represented the research efforts of ethnographers like Malinowski who said that, in sum, culture was one entity. Today, culture can refer to a variety of smaller, diverse groups and representations (Generation X, gay culture, gangs, rave culture, or the jock culture). The overuse of the label ‘culture’ has diluted its meaning and made it much more difficult to define exactly what we are studying. Postmodernists argue that the term ‘culture’ should be dropped as a unit of meaning or study because the term is a mental construct of the ethnographer, not the people (Sands, 2002). Culture to postmodernists becomes a tool for a Western science, helping to maintain a hegemonic order in world relations. American cultural commodities have overwhelmed a good part of the world, by “smothering the senses with a consumerist virus” (Schiller, 1991, cited in Lull, 1995, p. 118). Postmodern researchers like George Marcus argue that there is no homogenous cultural reality, but ethnography should pursue observations in a variety of settings, not one location, to get a wide-ranging network of forces that mold and shape culture (Sands, 2002).

At the end of an ethnographic study, Spradley (1980) recommended you write a summary of the culture being studied, or formulate a cultural inventory. Major cultural domains as well as any cultural themes you have identified should be listed.

The goal of the cultural inventory is to condense the material to down to the brief facts and high points to simplify the analysis of cultural themes and patterns. Sands (2002) concluded culture changes almost instantaneously; these changes, he stated, are mostly out of our control. However, ethnography brings order and understanding out of chaos (Sands, 2002, p. 151).

In summary, modern ethnographers attempting to study culture must wrestle with the inevitable conflicts that will occur. Today's modernistic society is vastly different from that of the early ethnographers and applying the traditional view of cultural research to that world is difficult and complex. The rapidly changing physical and cultural environments in today's world places a challenge for the ethnographer: The Communication Age with its rapid advances in communicative technology has forced researchers to comprehend the value of the traditional view of culture, yet embrace the homogenizing process Western civilization has inflicted on the world through the Internet, television, movies, and other mass media. Culture is no longer defined in simplistic forms. It must be explained in a variety of sub-cultures that Sands (2002) calls the genesis of contemporary culture.

### Sport Culture

The expansion of the study of sport culture has paralleled the rapid change in Western society since the 1960's. Sands (2002) noted that the old guard anthropologists – mentored by the classical works of Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown – were retiring and being replaced by anthropologists who were open to less-traditional academic research. Calling the old guard the “armchair anthropologists” who practiced “quasi-anthropology” because of their simplistic method of defining culture in the manner consistent with the theory of cultural evolution, this group produced “grand theories” of human development far removed from the cultural reality of the world (Sands, 2002, p. 3). Their data was anecdotal and including second hand information supplied to them by others. These researchers conducted fieldwork, but not to the broad extent the definition of ethnography envisions today.

Legitimacy in sport cultural research was advanced by through the seminal research (1959) of John Roberts, Malcom Arth, and Robert Bush, who produced a work entitled “Games in Culture,” which appeared in a major scholarly journal, *American Anthropologist*. Their work was the first attempt to define the concept of games cross-culturally, and more significantly opened the debate among anthropologists concerning the place of sport in human society (Sands, 2002).

Noted anthropologist Leslie White, in his 1964 presidential address to the American Anthropologist Association, suggested that a cross-cultural anthropology could provide an acceptable model for the study of sport, especially baseball, which White saw as a defining element of American culture (Sands, 2002). Fox (1961) produced a study on the use of magic in baseball by the Pueblo Indians in “Pueblo Baseball: A New Use for Old Witchcraft.” Kendall Blanchard and Alyce Cheska carried out pioneering sport research on Native American sport and also explored the role of sport in non-Western society (Sands, 2002).

Edward Norebeck became an influential voice in advancing the value of researching sport in a cultural context. In 1974, Norebeck, along with Cheska, Michael Salter, Blanchard and other sport anthropologists, founded *TAASP* (The Anthropological Association for the Study of Play), a group that included members from anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, physical education, kinesiology, and others. Yearly conferences were held in the 1980’s, and annual meeting notes were published. From this foundation, Blanchard and Cheska published in 1985 the first-ever cross-cultural study of sport, *Anthropology and Sport*, which was a successful first attempt at placing the study of sport in a rigorous methodology (Sands, 2002). Blanchard published a second edition in 1995, and Sands published a first modern look at the discipline, *Sport and Culture: At Play in the Fields of Anthropology* in 1999, and a first-ever book on sport and culture, *Anthropology, Sport and Culture*, also in 1999. Sands’ 2002 book, *Sport Ethnography* is the only publication available which provides a primer on conducting sport ethnographic research from an academic perspective.

It is important to note that through the rapidly changing landscape of sport cultural studies, the work of Geertz (1973) on Balinese cock fighting (“Deep Play:

Notes on the Balinese Cockfight”) became the centerpiece for the legitimacy of sport studies in mainstream anthropology. Geertz’ work was the first to place sport in a cultural context, and its impact opened a vast array of sport research. Geertz did not merely study cockfighting, but more importantly, examined the depth that cockfighting was ingrained into the culture of the people. This research played a major role in a revolution of anthropology where scholars began to examine sport seriously in a cultural context (Sands, 2002).

Sands stated the social upheaval of the 1960’s and 1970’s caused social scientists to utilize the study of sport to explain social ills like hegemony, racism, and social inequality. The Olympics became a worldwide platform for social protest with the Black Power Movement at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Games in Munich, the Western boycott of the 1980 Games in Moscow, and the subsequent Eastern Bloc boycott of the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. Sport had consequently become a part of national pride and political rhetoric lifted the cultural study of sport to a place of legitimacy in modern scholarly research.

Sands described how anthropologists began to embrace this naturalistic perspective in sports ethnography, as studies on female track athletes in China (Brownell, 1995), bodybuilding (Klein, 1988; Bolin, 1997), baseball (Klein, 1991, 1997), Kenyan distance running (Bale & Sang, 1996), and junior-college football (Sands, 1999) emerged. Alongside the scholarly study of sport culture is a large body of popular books, like *From Red Ink to Roses* (Telander, 1994), *Friday Night Lights* (Bissinger, 1990), *Hockey Night in Canada* (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993), and *A Season On The Brink* (Feinstein, 1986). These are examples of a researcher immersing themselves in the sporting culture and then reporting the ensuing cultural patterns that emerge.

Despite evidence to support an increased study of sport culture, Sands concluded sport ethnography has taken a step backwards in the 1990’s. He stated that few institutions offer courses in the study of sport in anthropology departments. Other social sciences offer these courses, but the discipline from which the study of sport culture evolved has essentially ignored it. Additionally, sessions on sport and

culture are absent from major anthropology conferences. Miller (1997, p. 115) wondered, "what might explain the continuing marginality of sports to anthropology and social theory even as it is central to popular, folk and commodified life?" Sands criticized anthropology and its belief that sport is beneath the discipline because it is a peripheral activity to the real study of human behavior. For example, anthropologists would see a kinship study versus a study of Samoan wrestling matches as more valuable to scholarly research. Sands argued that in light of anthropology's current search for its place in academia, sport offers a field of study that is becoming increasingly important in relations among cultures, nations, and societies. Peacock (1996, p. 15) stated "humanistic interests ... need{s} to probe the human experience in its variety (sport), but also in its abiding unity.... We need to not abandon the search for pattern and regularity in human life."

Sands (2002, p. 150) stated "sport reflects culture and culture reflects sport." In his book *Sport Ethnography*, Sands argued that sport has become a dominant part of contemporary human society. He noted that many cultural anthropologists dismiss the study of sport culture as being trivial with regard to the overall study of human behavior, which is routed through religion, economic or political systems, or even language. He posits, "sport is pervasive and never ceasing, casting giant shadows on other facets of life. For a culture, a world to go crazy over a ball game, a camel race, a lacrosse match, a run, speaks volumes about human behavior" (p. 150).

### Ethnography of Communication

The ethnography of communication is the application of ethnographic methods to the communication patterns of a group (Littlejohn, 1999). More simply, the interpreter attempts to make sense of the forms of communication employed by the members of the group or culture. This study of language, both verbal and non-verbal, spoken and written in its social context, forms the basis for ethnography of communication.

Formed in the traditions of linguistics and anthropology in the 1960's and 1970's by anthropologist Dell Hymes, the ethnography of communication seeks to

discover the communicative conduct of a community; this conduct is the unit of analysis in the study. Hymes (1974) suggested formal linguistics is not sufficient by itself to uncover a complete understanding of language because it ignores the highly variable ways in which language is used in everyday communication.

Noted ethnographer Gerry Philipsen (1989) presented four assumptions of the ethnography of communication: 1) participants in a local cultural community create shared meaning, or, they use codes that have some degree of common understanding; 2) communicators in any cultural group must coordinate their actions; there must be some order or system when individuals communicate; 3) meanings and actions are particular to individual cultural groups; and 4) not only are the patterns of behavior and codes different from group to group, but each group also has its own ways of understanding certain codes and actions.

Littlejohn (1999) confirmed that all cultures communicate differently, but the messages used by the cultures must have a shared code, communicators who know and use the code, a channel, a setting, a message form, a topic, and an event created by transmission of the message. It must be clear that anything can be a message, but it must be understood as such by the natives (Littlejohn, 1999). He gives the examples of snake handling and baggy pants being communicative messages. The shared codes of snakes and pants could send a clear message to members of the group, while being completely baffling to the outsider. These codes cannot be deciphered without further ethnographic study.

Hymes (1974) proposed that the framework of an ethnography of communication be divided into four aspects. The first three relate to communicative events or the events' components, relationships and capacity within the group. The fourth addresses the system within which these events occur. The event, as described by Hymes (1974), possesses similar components as those mentioned by Littlejohn. Each event contains six components: 1) setting, 2) participants, 3) message channel, 4) message code, 5) message form, and 6) message content or topic. Once the researcher comprehends what basic forms to watch for in the group, the ethnographic inquiry can begin with ... "the work of discovering what constitutes

a communicative event and what classes of events are recognized within a community” (Hymes, 1974, p. 29).

It is clearly noted by Hymes that the system is the primary force that strengthens both the credibility and usefulness of this method. “It is this aspect (activity of the system) that the ethnographic study of communication makes closest contact with the social, political, and moral concerns with communication, conceived as value and a determinant in society and in personal lives” (Hymes, 1974, p. 30). To discover the communicative patterns and meanings in a culture, the community must first be identified, specific communicative events and their components must be recognized, relationships between the individuals and the group must be identified, and a clear understanding of how these events work to define cultural meaning must be recognized.

### Communication Theory

Communication, according to Littlejohn (1999), is highly pervasive in our society, and an important, yet complex aspect of human life. It is central to all human experience, separates us from other animals because of our ability to communicate at a higher level, and helps create meaning in our everyday experiences (Littlejohn, 1999). The academic study of communication has grown exponentially in the twentieth century due primarily to the rise of communication technologies such as radio, television, telephone, satellites, and computer networking, along with industrialization, big business, and global politics (Littlejohn, 1999). After World War I, an intense interest in studying communication developed due to advances in technology and literacy. Developments in the study of propaganda and its political influence, and the rise in the development of the social sciences, sociology and social psychology, stimulated a deeper academic focus on the study of communication as an academic discipline. From those foundational bases, many different approaches to the theoretical study of communication have arisen.

Because the process of communication is so complex, a precise definition is arguably impossible to put forward. Dance and Larson (1976) listed 126 different

definitions of communication in *The Functions of Human Communication: A Theoretical Approach*. Clevenger (1991) stated that the problem in defining communication for scholarly or scientific purposes stems from the fact that the verb 'to communicate' is well established in the common lexicon and therefore not easily captured for scientific use. It is one of the most overused terms in the English language (Clevenger, 1991).

Dance (1970) forwarded three points of "critical conceptual differentiation" that form the basic dimensions of communication (Littlejohn, 1999, p. 6). First is the level of observation, or abstractness. Some definitions are broad as "the process that links discontinuous parts of the living world to one another." Others are more general and restrictive as "the means of sending military messages, orders, etc., as by telephone, telegraph, radio, couriers" (Littlejohn, 1999, p. 6). The second distinction is intentionality. Some definitions must include purposeful messages, such as "where a source transmits a message to a receiver to affect the latter's behavior," while others do not require this. For example, "a process that makes common to two or several what was the monopoly of one or some" (Littlejohn, 1999, p. 7). The third dimension is normative judgment. Specific definitions would include a statement of success or accuracy, while others would be more general as "communication is the verbal interchange of a thought or idea" (Littlejohn, 1999, p. 7).

It is clear that the concepts of level of observation, intentionality, and normative judgment allow for a wide interpretation as to what communication actually is. Anderson (1991) noted, "While there is not a right or wrong perspective, choices regarding [definitions] are not trivial. These perspectives launch scholars down different theoretical trajectories, predispose them to ask distinct questions, and set them up to conduct different kinds of communication studies" (Littlejohn, 1999, p. 9).

There are numerous genres of communication and Littlejohn (1999) organized them into a five-part model. They include structural and functional theories, or those that designate the belief that social structures are real and function in ways that can be observed objectively. These focus on social and cultural



structures. Second are cognitive and behavioral theories, which is a combination of two academic disciplines, which shares similar characteristics. Cognitivism recognizes the stimulus-response link in communication, but takes it a step further by emphasizing the information processing that occurs between the two. Behaviorism was the term used up until the 1960's, but today has evolved into cognitivism. Third are interactionist theories, which view social life as a process of interaction. Interaction theorists believe that communication is the most important part of communication theory because it allows social structures to exist. It becomes the glue that holds social patterns together because meanings are constructed by the act of communication. Fourth are interpretive theories, which attempts to discover meaning from actions and texts. The goal of interpretation is not to discover the laws that govern events, but to uncover the ways people actually understand their own experience (Anderson, 1996). Finally, critical theories are a loose collection of ideas that focus on issues of inequality and oppression. Most critical theorists do not merely observe; they criticize by observing conflicts in the world and evaluating the ways communication perpetuates domination of one group over another (Littlejohn, 1999).

<b>Communication Theories</b>	<b>Description of Genre</b>
<b>Structural and Functional</b>	Social and cultural structures that are real and can be observed objectively
<b>Cognitive and Behavioral</b>	Combination of cognitivism (Information processing in stimulus-response link) and behaviorism (term used until the 1960's)
<b>Interactionist</b>	Communication is an interactional process that allows social structures to exist
<b>Interpretive</b>	Attempts to discover meaning from actions and texts of people
<b>Critical</b>	Loose assemblage of ideas that focus on issues of inequality and oppression

**Figure 1. Littlejohn's Five Part Communication Genres Model**

From "Theories of Human Communication," by S.W. Littlejohn, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

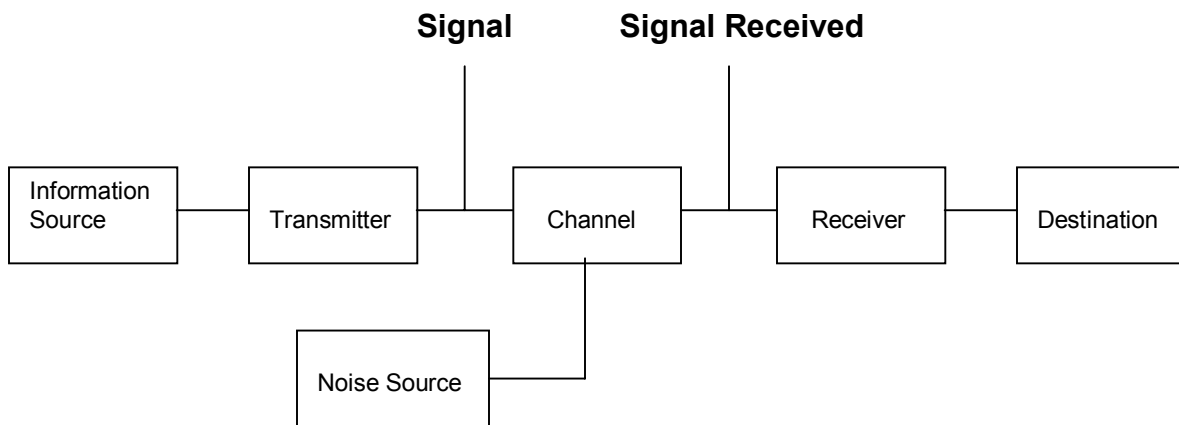
For the purpose of this study, the cognitive theories relating to the stimulus-response inertia of the communication process will be studied. The selection of a leadership style and the ensuing communication patterns that emerge from it are a direct product of this theoretical basis.

Littlejohn (1999) also classified communication by level, or context. Interpersonal communication, or face-to-face communication mostly in private settings, and its ensuing relationships, which is the core issue of this paper, is one level. Others include group communication, or the interaction of people in small groups, usually decision-making settings. Interpersonal communication also could apply to group settings, but this study relates only to the superior-subordinate dyadic pairing. Third, is organizational communication, which occurs in large cooperative networks and includes virtually all-interpersonal and group communication processes. It includes study of the structure and function of organizations, human relations, communication and the process of organizing, and organizational culture. Fourth is mass communication, which deals with public communication, primarily through mediated sources like newspapers, radio, television or the Internet.

Information theory is an important conceptual frame for the study of communication between SID's and their subordinates. On a basic level, information theory is concerned with the transmission and reception of messages, rather than the meaning of the message. Information begins with entropy, or randomness, or lack of organization in a situation (Littlejohn, 1999). Information is similar to entropy because it is a measure of uncertainty; the more the uncertainty, the greater amount of information is necessary. When a situation is completely predictable, or negentropy, there is no information present. Communication theorists postulate that if a situation is uncertain (Littlejohn, 1999 uses an example of a coin toss to illustrate), more signals will be needed to communicate what the result will be. However, if a two-headed coin were used, there would be no new information generated because the result would be the same each time. Also, Littlejohn (1999) explains that the number of choices, or alternatives, available to a person to explain an outcome, and can define information. In a complex situation with many outcomes, more information is available.

A central tenet in communication research is the basic model of transmission by Shannon and Weaver (1949) (See Figure 1). In this model, the *source* formulates or selects a *message*, consisting of signs to be transmitted. The *transmitter* converts the message into a set of *signals* that are sent over a *channel* to a *receiver*. The receiver converts the signals into a message (Littlejohn, 1999).

The Shannon and Weaver (1949) model can be used in many contexts. A television message is a prime example according to Littlejohn (1999). The



**Figure 2. Shannon and Weaver's Model of Communication.**

From "Mathematical Theory of Communication," by C. Shannon and W. Weaver, 1949, In S. W. Littlejohn (Ed.). *Theories of Human Communication*, (pp. 48). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

producers, directors, and announcers are the source; the message is transmitted by airwaves (channel) to the TV set, which converts electromagnetic waves back into a visual impression for the viewer (Littlejohn, 1999, p. 47). Pertinent to this study is the example in interpersonal communication where the speaker's brain is the source, the vocal system the transmitter, and the air medium the channel. The listener's ear is the receiver, and the listener's brain the destination (Littlejohn, 1999).

Two other factors that influence the accurate transmission of information are noise and channel capacity. *Noise* is any disturbance in the channel that distorts or otherwise masks the signal. The problem in any form of communication is the problem of getting the transmission decoded by the receiver in the exact same form in which it was originally transmitted (Littlejohn, 1999). Redundancy in language

allows the receiver to compensate for missing information that is created by noise, which distorts, masks, or replaces signals. It allows the receiver to compensate and fill in the gaps of missing information.

*Channel capacity* is the maximum amount of information that can be transmitted over a channel in a specified period of time. The actual amount of information in the channel is *throughput* (Littlejohn, 1999). If throughput exceeds channel capacity, distortion will occur or transmission will slow down.

It can be concluded that efficient transmission of information involves the receiver decoding the message quickly and that the channel capacity not be exceeded. Also, a code with sufficient redundancy for the receiver to fill in missing information is essential for accurate information transfer.

The production of messages for transmission is the logical next step in the development of theories related to the social nature of communication. Message production theories relate that the production and reception of messages are psychological matters focusing on individual traits, states, and processes (Littlejohn, 1999).

Later in this study, research will be presented contrasting the trait and state theory explanations. This body of research focuses on relatively static characteristics of individuals and the ways these characteristics are associated with other traits and variables—the relationship between particular personality types and certain sorts of messages. Trait theories predict that if you have a certain personality type, you will communicate in certain ways (Littlejohn, 1999). By contrast, state explanations focus on the state of mind that persons experience for a period of time. States are unstable and transitory; senders are more cautious about evaluating arguments against their position. Trait and state explanations can be used in concert with one another and the combination of the two theories probably describes how you communicate (Littlejohn, 1999). A third theory that will not be dealt with in detail is process explanation, which examines the mental mechanisms of how you actually send and receive messages (Littlejohn, 1999).

Five trait theories provide background support to identify the methods by which communication patterns emerge in college athletics. Communication

apprehension, rhetorical sensitivity, communicator style, aggression and equivocation theory are the primary concepts that help frame the traits individuals use to produce messages.

Communication apprehension (CA) essentially noted that many people are afraid to communicate with others. McCroskey (1984) and his colleagues discovered that fear of communicating was a problem for many people. *Traitlike CA* is a tendency to be apprehensive to communicate in many settings, and those that suffer from this fear may avoid all forms of oral communication. Those with *generalized context CA*, have a fear of communicating only in specific situations (public speaking for example). Others, according to McCroskey (1984), have an even more specific communication fear, or *person group CA*, where they avoid communicating with specific groups like the homeless (Littlejohn, 1999). Pathological CA, in which an individual suffers high trait like fear of communicating, can cause personal problems such as avoiding communication, which prevents normal participation in societal activities (McCroskey, 1984).

Rhetorical sensitivity, or the tendency to adapt messages to audiences, is based on the concept that good communication comes from sensitivity and care in adjusting what you say to a listener or audience. The concern for feelings of others generated a description of three types of communicators: (1) noble selves, who stick to their personal ideals without variation; (2) rhetorical adaptors, individuals who change their communication messages to please others without following their own personal scruples; and (3) rhetorically sensitive individuals, who are a middle group of those two extremes (Littlejohn, 1999).

Communicator style, based on the work of Norton (1983), stated we communicate on two levels. We give information to others and we also present that information in a form that tells others how to comprehend and respond to that message (Norton, 1983). Norton believed that the signals given by the communicator are “style messages” and “signal how a literal (primary) message should be taken, filtered, interpreted, or understood (Norton, 1983, in Littlejohn, 1999, p.104). Norton further explained recipients look for style messages after the primary message has been delivered to ascertain how the message should be

interpreted. That is, if the message is ambiguous or contradictory to the normal communication style of the superior, they will look for the style messages that follow the primary to help interpret its actual meaning. Littlejohn (1999) provided an example that if a manager is taken as gruff, laid-back, whimsical, or serious, the characteristics associated with their communication constitute the dominant communication style.

Norton (1983) identified nine variables defining the communication style of an individual. Dominance, dramatic behavior, contentiousness, animation, impression leaving, relaxation, attentiveness, openness, and friendliness, were listed. He clarified a great deal of overlap exists between each of these variables and that a person rarely communicates using one of these styles alone.

Aggression, or the application of pressure on another person, is also a common communication trait (Littlejohn, 1999). Autocratic leaders would utilize this communication trait to send their message to subordinates. Infante and Rancer (1996) listed four aggressive communication traits: (1) assertiveness – putting your rights forward without hampering others' individual rights; (2) argumentativeness – the tendency to engage in conversations about controversial topics to support your own point of view, and to refute opposing beliefs; (3) hostility – the tendency to display anger involving irritability, negativism, resentment and suspicion; and (4) verbal aggressiveness – the attempt to hurt someone emotionally, not physically, using insults, profanity, threats, and emotional outbursts. Infante and Rancer (1996) also noted these communication traits exist on a continuum, and individuals do not always display these specific methods. They usually are used in combination with one another.

Equivocation theory is the final message production theory and it defines how people communicate using sometimes unclear, not direct, or straightforward messages (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990). All people communicate in this manner on occasion to protect other peoples' feelings and to escape from using statements where the truth does hurt. Bavelas et al. (1990) stated all communication consists of a simple four-part process: (1) I, (2) am saying something, (3) to you, (4) in this situation. When you are clear and direct, all four

parts of this equation are clearly expressed. However, when you equivocate, you are ambiguous about one or more of the parts. This equivocation, or not utilizing the truth, is an *avoidance-avoidance situation*, where the communicator realizes all apparent alternatives have negative consequences (Bavelas et al., 1990). Lying to disguise the truth, or being bluntly honest, are both negative when communicating with another person, but Bavelas et al. (1990) found this was commonplace.

### Interpersonal Communication

Schutz (1966) defined the basic way we as humans can meet our interpersonal needs through interpersonal communication. Each interpersonal relationship is based upon affection, inclusion, and control. Affection is the need of the self to be loved (Wenbug & Wilmot, 1973). One who fulfills this need is labeled “personal,” while those who fail to achieve the needed affection are “underpersonal,” or “overpersonal” (Wenbug & Wilmot, 1973, p. 25). Inclusion is the need to feel significant and worthwhile in a relationship. The “undersocial” person fears being ignored, so wants to be alone, and is therefore at risk of conflict in communication relationships. The “oversocial” person, also fears rejection, and compensates for this by displaying talkative characteristics (Wenbug & Wilmot, 1973, p. 27). Control refers to the need to feel that one is responsible and has come to grips with their work environment (Wenbug & Wilmot, 1973, p. 27). Those who have not satisfied this need are “autocrats,” those who must dominate and be totally in control; or “abdocrats,” those who are submissive in interpersonal relationships, have little confidence and perceives themselves as stupid and irresponsible (Wenbug & Wilmot, 1973, p. 27).

Brooks and Emmert (1976) said interpersonal communication is one of the basic human activities we engage in every day – following breathing, eating, sleeping, and reproducing. They went one step further and stated it could be more important than eating and reproducing because we cannot engage in those two acts unless we have mastered interpersonal communication. The satisfaction of basic human physical needs – food, sex, shelter, sleep and physical security (Maslow, 1954), social needs – affection, inclusion, and control – as has already been

described by Schutz (1966), and consistency needs – the validation of our ideas, values, perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes (Brooks & Emmert, 1976, p. 20), are at the core of the intense desire to communicate.

Relationships, according to Knapp and Miller (1994), are at the heart of interpersonal communication. By way of definition, Knapp and Miller said a relationship is a set of expectations two people have for their behavior based on the pattern of interaction between them. Grimshaw (1982) noted interpersonal communication is symbolic interactions strategically controlled in the pursuit of personal objectives. Sigman (1998) said relationships are categories of meaning that require patterned behavioral construction (communication) on the part of community members. Meaning is derived from the social-cultural heritage; it identifies people, the associations, between and among the defined people, and the rights and responsibilities of these people across time and space (Sigman, 1998). Rawlins and Holl (1987) consider a relationship a “communication achievement” (in Conville and Rogers, 1998, p. 54).

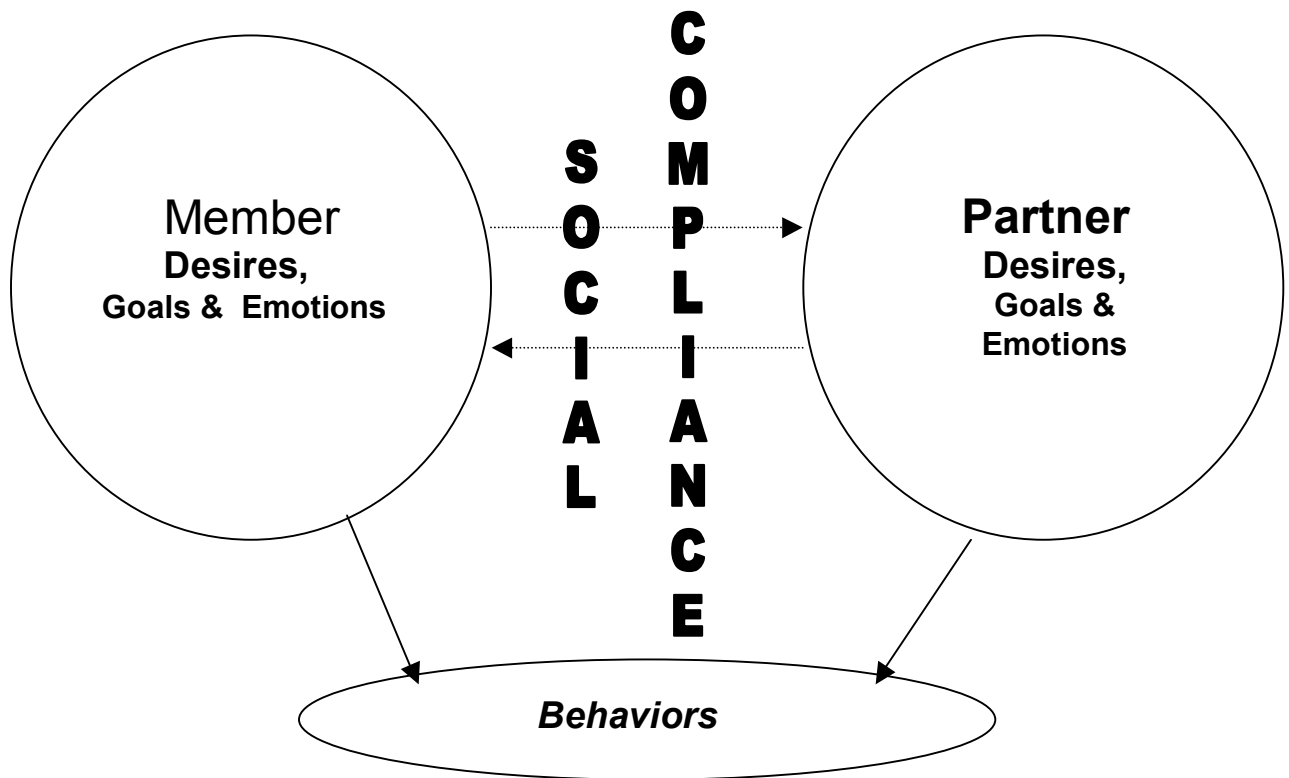
Sigman (1998) presented three behavioral orders of human communication that frame the discussion of interpersonal communication in relationships. These are interaction, social, and semiotic orders. Interaction consists of codes that enable communicators to enter, maintain, and exit both focused and unfocused interaction (Goffman, 1963, 1972). The social order is composed of those rules for the use of behavior to construct, maintain, and modify identities, relational groupings, and institutional affiliations. The semiotic order covers the structure of each communication channel, or the codes that establish grammatical and ungrammatical utterances or performances of a particular channel (Sigman, 1998). Each of these orders partially overlaps and interacts to help define the communication in interpersonal relationships.

Relationships, by nature, are not idiosyncratic or unpatterned (Sigman, 1998). Each relationship is defined by a community (or organization) as comprising some unit of significance (its semantic dimension), and some organization to the behavior itself (its syntactic dimension) (Sigman, 1998). Six semantic-syntactic dimensions of relationships are presented by Sigman (1998). Projected time duration – the time



comembers commit to the relationship and the patterning of expected activity with the framework of the organization (marriage is for a life-time, affairs are short term); Degree of On-Callness – the necessity of one party to be available to the other when the other needs it (a doctor-patient relationship for example); Interruptability – the interruption of a relationship by factors such as death, taking out the trash, or going to work or school - these all extract different consequences on the communicative relationships; Exclusivity – some relationships do not permit other types of communication to occur with others (husband-wife, fraternities or sororities, or others where communication outside those groups is frowned upon; Nature of On-Behalfness – when a relationship is interrupted by outside factors, a representative of the co members may act on behalf of the relationship co members to commit the relationship to other courses of action; Stages – the ongoing communication stream is punctuated into discrete units or episodes of meaning (Sigman, 1998).

Communication is seen as highly consequential to relationships. Two models for thinking on relationships in communication have been presented by Sigman (1998). The first (See Figure 3) sees relationships, as deriving exclusively from the members' desires, goals, and emotions. Individuals convey to each other or to a sociological status that they have achieved (in marriage, for example) a communication level that demands adherence to certain norms. This communication is directed to their relationship partner and to various others and is designed to be informative (Sigman, 1998).



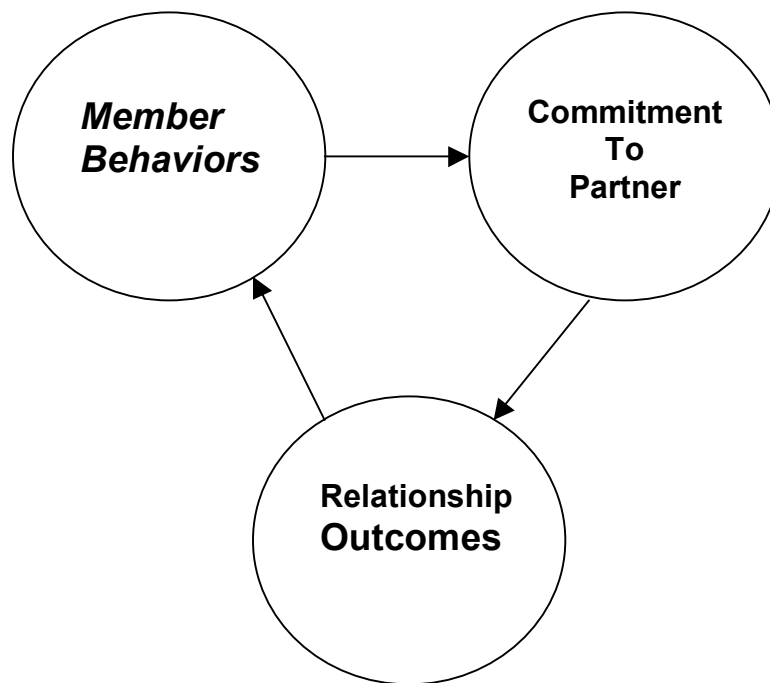
**Figure 3. Sigman's Relationships in Communication – Model 1**

From "The Meaning of Relationship in Interpersonal Communication," by S.J. Sigman, In R.L. Conville and L.E. Rogers (Eds.). Westport, CT: Praeger.

The second model posits that individuals and their relationships are in a continual process of behavior production. The co members' behaviors establish commitments for certain behaviors, and it is that combination of behaviors and commitments over time that yields the sense that the relationship has reached a comfortable level (Sigman, 1998).

Sigman (in Conville & Rogers, 1998, p. 62) gave two examples:

1. husband → rule → behavior (that is, a person who is a husband and knows the relevant rules behaves according to these)
2. behavior → commitments → husband (that is, behavior is produced by a persons, and this behavior finds the person committed to producing other behavior [the commitment deriving from the application of a variety of relevance and coherence rules]; this behavior-through-time is what being a husband means)



**Figure 4. Sigman's Relationships in Communication – Model 2**

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From "The Meaning of Relationship in Interpersonal Communication," by S.J. Sigman, In R.L. Conville and L.E. Rogers (Eds.). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Interpersonal communication is defined by the relationships of the members of the dyadic pairing. In this study, the communicative relationship between the selected superior-subordinate pairing -- sports information directors and their assistants -- will be evaluated. Montgomery (1993) stated that relationship communication theory is based on four core assumptions: (1) relationships are always connected to communication and cannot be separated from it; (2) the nature of the relationship is defined by the communication between its members; (3) relationships are always defined implicitly rather than explicitly; and (4) relationships develop over time through a negotiation process between those involved.

One primary leadership variable in organizations is the superior-subordinate communication relationship. Redding (1972) noted within work organizations there are always subordinates and superiors even though those terms may not be used exactly like that or expressed in that manner and the roles may be reversible. Research on superior-subordinate communication has focused on the exchange of information and influence exerted between organizational members, at least one of

whom has formal (as defined by official organization sources) authority to direct and evaluate the activities of other organizational members (Jablin, 1979, p. 1202). The types of communicative messages exchanged between superiors and subordinates usually focuses on information concerning organizational procedures and practices, indoctrination of goals, job instructions and rationale, or feedback about performance (Katz & Kahn, 1966, p. 245). Subordinates' communications to superiors were concerned with information about themselves, their coworkers and their problems, information about tasks to be completed, or information on policies and procedures (Katz & Kahn, 1966).

A thorough, in-depth compilation of empirical research on the nature and functions of superior-subordinate communication was conducted by Jablin (1979). Nine topical categories emerged: (1) interaction patterns and related attitudes; (2) openness in communication; (3) upward distortion; (4) upward influence; (5) semantic-information distance; (6) effective versus ineffective superiors; (7) personal characteristics; (8) feedback; and (9) systemic variables.

Volard and Davies (1982) supported Jablin's work on interaction patterns and related attitudes noting that superiors spend one-third to two-thirds of their day communicating with subordinates concerning task-related issues in face-to-face meetings. Openness to send and receive messages, and the ability to frankly express divergent views of that of management defined a positive open communication relationship. Jablin (1979) confirmed substantial research shows subordinates are more satisfied with their jobs when they have an "open" versus "closed" communication relationship with their superiors. Upward distortion refers to the phenomena where the information subordinates provide to superiors is often distorted based on a subordinate's upward mobility goals, ascendancy in the company and security needs, trust in superiors, gender, and motivation. Subordinates are hesitant to communicate negative or unfavorable information to their superior. Conversely, superiors compensate for this positive "halo" effect often given by subordinates by considering the messages as inaccurate (Jablin, 1979). Upward influence studies the influence in superior-subordinate communication focused on two dimensions: (1) the effects of a superior's influence in the

organization's hierarchy has on their relationship with subordinates; and (2) the transmission of influence by subordinates to superiors. The Pelz Effect stated subordinate satisfaction with a supervisor is a by-product not only of an open, supportive relationship, but also of the supervisor's ability to satisfy the subordinates' needs by influencing those higher in the organization on behalf of the subordinate (Pelz, 1952). Semantic-Information Distance refers to the gap in agreement on specific issues between superiors and subordinates. Jablin (1979) found in his research that the gap in the relationship may be a dysfunction in the dyadic pairing and that "it impairs the productivity, stability or adaptability of the dyad (Sussman, 1975, p. 198). Jablin (1979), in his review of literature on superior-subordinate communication, noted the study of effective communication behaviors of superiors has been evaluated far more than any other area of organizational communication. He reached two basic conclusions: (1) there is a common profile of effective communication characteristics of superiors; and (2) the communication qualities of effective leaders varies and is contingent on numerous situational factors. Redding (1972) provided five communication characteristics of effective leaders: they are (1) communication-minded, enjoy talking and can explain instructions and policies; (2) they are good listeners, are approachable and listen to suggestions and complaints; (3) they tend to ask or persuade, rather than tell or demand; (4) they are sensitive to feelings and are careful to reprimand in private rather than in public; and (5) they are more open about passing information along and explain the reasons behind policy and regulation changes. Graen and Cashman (1975) confirmed that dyadic communication exchange patterns that exist between superiors and subordinates are viewed as unique to each dyad. Personal characteristics like locus of control, dogmatism and communication apprehension, and the gender of the composition of the dyad have also been studied to identify other variables that influence the communication patterns evolving in relationships. These characteristics are related to the Richmond, McCroskey and Davis (1982) study that suggested subordinates perceive the communication of coercive power with a "boss centered," tell-type management communications style, and that subordinate satisfaction with supervision increases as managerial communication style becomes more "employee

centered. “ This will be discussed in more detail later in the study. Feedback has attracted an expansive amount of research, and Jablin (1979) concluded feedback from superiors to subordinates appears related to subordinate performance and satisfaction, and a subordinate’s job performance controls the nature for their satisfaction or motivation. Conflict is inherent in any organization, and numerous studies have identified conflict strategies used by superiors. Conrad (1983; Putnam & Wilson, 1982) stated supervisors use controlling or forcing strategies when managing conflicts. Also, the superior’s choice of conflict management mode reflects the supervisor’s level of self-confidence, perceptions of skill, and level in the organization (Conrad, 1983). Systemic variables like technology, organizational structure, and environment, among many, significantly affected the communication levels between superiors and communication.

In summary, interpersonal communication between superiors and subordinates relates to the identification of three variables in the relationship: (1) power and status, trust, and semantic-information distance. All of these factors influence how the communication patterns are established and utilized in an organizational communication structure. It must be recognized that interpersonal communication is continuous, and thoroughly embedded into organizational culture. Jablin (1979) and Sussman (1975) noted most research on superior-subordinate communication has examined only the relationship between the superior and the subordinate. They mentioned problems exist in the literature because employees are likely to perform three roles; superior, subordinates and coworker (peer) in some capacity in the organization. Further research could be conducted to separate the relationships of these different dyadic pairings.

### Sports Information Directors

The sports information director has a wide range of responsibilities in intercollegiate athletics. The SID must master a diversity of technical skills like gathering, producing, and disseminating news, generating publicity, and publications design and production (Davis, 1978; Michaels, 1993). They must also perform statistics gathering, game management, advertising, fund-raising, special events and

other tasks such as maintaining relations with external publics like boosters, media, and other faculty and staff (Helitzer, 1996; Michaels, 1993). The sports information director must be “highly motivated, persistent and a creative administrator, as well as diplomatic and intelligent.” Sports information personnel are individuals whose mission is to promote and publicize the intercollegiate athletic program at their institution or organization (Davis, 1978; Helitzer, 1996).

The actual job function of the sports information director falls within the scope of the public relations activity, (McCleneghan, 2000; Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000; Neupauer, 1999). Stoldt et al. (2001) noted the two keywords (public relations and sports information) are not interchangeable; they are two separate and distinct entities in public relations with sports information work being the subset of the public relations function examined in this review. Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig (1995), after studying the relationship between public relations professionals and their company’s CEO’s in 1993, stated public relations personnel must play a managerial role for their organizations to move toward excellence in communication.

Borrowing from research conducted in corporate America, public relations is viewed as a narrow specialty in the business world (Kinkead, 1992). Corporate CEO’s state that until public relations practitioners acquire generalist skills in business, they will be excluded from the strategic planning process (Kinkead, 1992). Many of today’s generation of athletic directors are adopting this viewpoint (McCleneghan, 2000). Adding to the problem, Stoldt (2000) found that this new breed of AD communicates more with the marketing director than the sports information director. Following an in-depth study, McCleneghan (2000) concluded athletic directors know little about public relations; or worse, believe they know a great deal.

Research indicates that modern-era duties like web publishing, electronic databases, and live Internet broadcasts, have increased the workload heaped upon SID staffs (McCleneghan, 2000). In reality, an SID’s primary job functions are sufficient to keep them busy for 40+ hours a week. McCleneghan (1995) conducted a benchmark study to research two concepts: (1) the demographic background, salaries, job duties, concerns, job difficulties, and the internal and external publics of

the sports information director; and (2) the attitudes of athletic management toward college sports information directors. His work was the first to investigate this specific sub-field of public relations.

The study surveyed SID's in nine geographic employment zones as defined by Editor and Publisher's weekly employment chart. Using cluster-sampling methodology, McCleneghan (1995) requested demographic information from the SID's and found the following data:

Table 1

### The SID Benchmark Profile, SID Demographics

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SID is predominately male (80%)  
 Median age – 38.5 years  
 BA degree in journalism (PR emphasis)  
 No advanced degree  
 \$38,500 annual salary  
 Employed 10 years at present institution  
 Member of CoSIDA, but not PRSA or IABC (International Association of Business Communicators)  
 Served three years as Assistant SID  
 Prior media experience was mostly with a newspaper (1.5 median years)  
 More than 60% interned at present school as an undergraduate  
 Sixteen had an advanced degree  
 75% have the athletic director as their superior  
 The rest report to director of information, communication, public affairs or public relations

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From "The sports information director—no attention, no respect, and a PR practitioner in trouble," by S. McCleneghan, 1995, *Public Relations Quarterly*, 40, (2), 28-33.

Table 2

### SID Time Spent on Job Responsibilities

55%	Administrative duties
15%	Specific sport responsibility
10%	Writing press releases
10%	Working with media
10%	Special projects

From "The sports information director—no attention, no respect, and a PR practitioner in trouble," by S. McCleneghan, 1995, *Public Relations Quarterly*, 40, (2), 28-33.



Table 3

### SID Concerns about Intercollegiate Athletics Today

58%	How to increase financial base to support all teams
26%	Financial support for gender equity
7%	Academic integrity
5%	Media coverage
4%	College sports as a business

From "The sports information director—no attention, no respect, and a PR practitioner in trouble," by S. McCleneghan, 1995, *Public Relations Quarterly*, 40, (2), 28-33.

Table 4

### External Publics of the SID

1	Radio play-by-play personnel
2	TV beat reporters
3	Newspaper beat reporters
4	Sports columnists
5	Live TV game producer/director
6	TV sports directors
7	Newspaper sports editors
8	Other schools' SID's
9	Local printers
10	Booster club officials

From "The sports information director—no attention, no respect, and a PR practitioner in trouble," by S. McCleneghan, 1995, *Public Relations Quarterly*, 40, (2), 28-33.

Table 5

### Internal Publics of the SID

1	Assistant SID
2	Coaches
3	Athletic director
4	Interns, graduate assistants
5	Athletes at school
6	SID secretary
7	Development director
8	Marketing director
9	School photographer
10	Recruiting coordinator

From "The sports information director—no attention, no respect, and a PR practitioner in trouble," by S. McCleneghan, 1995, *Public Relations Quarterly*, 40, (2), 28-33.

Numerous themes emerged from the open-ended responses McCleneghan (1995) received from the SID's. His study was primarily qualitative in nature, so the findings are a representation of the responses from the returned surveys. They included:

- A lack of respect for SID professionals
- Many SID's are reluctant to advise athletic management about public relations
- SID's are treated as glorified 'executive assistants' rather than professionals
- The growth of media outlets has made the SID's job almost overwhelming
- SID's new to the profession lack the dedication to perform the duties
- The SID's workload is counterproductive to having a balanced personal and family life
- There is a tremendous burnout factor in the SID business
- There is a consistent lack of understanding and appreciation by athletic directors and college presidents for what SID's do and accomplish
- Most SID's are concerned about not having voice in the 'real issues' of college athletics
- The SID office is a 'catch all' dumping ground for coaches and athletic staff
- The growth of new age athletic directors who identify more with the business or marketing functions than public relations has caused a change in the way the SID profession is viewed by athletic administrators
- SID offices must operate on 'shoe string' budgets because of cutbacks
- Strained relationships with media create undue hardships for the SID

Of all the responses, McCleneghan (1995) concluded the three primary concerns of the modern SID are: (1) lack of respect from athletic management; (2) budget cutbacks which prohibit them from doing their job properly; and (3) the emerging influence of the marketing/business type athletic directors in the decision-making process. Based on the findings and the knowledge that counseling and advising management is a primary public relations goal and strategy, McCleneghan (1995) also found that this was not happening in college athletics. Not one SID in this study belonged to PRSA. McCleneghan quoted Ralph R. Zobell of Brigham Young University, "PRSA accreditation could help this profession. If PRSA accreditation were mandatory in the job description, would it change some of the problems with management they face today? Would it enhance outsiders' perceptions of their 'professionalism'? No one can say, but it's a step in the right

direction” (p. 32). He goes on to note that accreditation could turn into a territorial battle between directors of athletics and university public relations directors. Some SID’s view this turf battle as wrought with pros and cons. Some SID’s feel they are insulated from AD’s and coaches by reporting to university officials. McCleneghan (1995) also reports that some SID’s prefer to report to athletic directors. He concluded his study noting that CoSIDA should be the agency to confront the issue of accreditation and professionalism to bring SID’s to the forefront in the college athletic management structure.

The research has revealed a wide range of themes and patterns that are relevant to the smooth conduct of a NCAA Division I-A athletic department. The current study will seek to find how many of these variables are found in the SID office at a major football playing institution. The findings of the current study should provide information on how these variables affect SID communication within the structure of college athletics.

### CoSIDA

The majority of SID’s are members of the College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA), which is a collective organization of SID’s in the United States and Canada. CoSIDA, which was founded in 1957, is the group that evolved from the American College Public Relations Association (ACPRA), a national group of which college sports publicists were a part. College sports publicists inaugurated the new organization with 102 members and have seen it evolve into one with over 1,800 members in all 50 states, Canada and Puerto Rico. The 1999-2000 *CoSIDA Directory* listed more than 2,200 members (McCleneghan, 2000) and Neupauer (1999) estimated there are 1.5 million marketing and 300,000 media front office positions in professional and amateur sport. A key component of this review is the following statement: “The association is designed to help the SID at all levels. It is the desire of the members to have the profession take its rightful place on the decision-making levels of college athletics. Everything done is geared to this objective” (CoSIDA website, 2002). This visionary statement showed SID’s and

their sanctioning organization is desirous of inclusion into the management level of intercollegiate athletics.”

### Theory Development in the Study of SID's

Stoldt (1998) noted the majority of what has been written on sports information directors has been anecdotal. He stated the development of theory in sport management has not extended into the area of sport public relations and that establishing a strong theoretical base with which to study the SID profession is essential regarding sport public relations in higher education institutions.

The few research efforts that have looked at sports information directors have centered on the four-trait communicative scale model developed by McCroskey and Richmond (1982, 1987, and 1993), and the four-step role typology model developed by Broom and Smith (1979). In general, these studies have centered on the development of interpersonal communication skills of the PR director and how they use those to interact with the publics they serve. Grunig and Hunt (1984) presented four models in which the PR director operates with internal and external constituents, while McCroskey and Richmond (1982, 1987, and 1993) studied in detail the communicative traits ranging from shyness to talkaholics that could enable SID's to become more proficient in obtaining access to athletic department management positions.

Grunig and Hunt (1984) identified four environmental models as historical stages in the development of public relations. The four models are different and have varying public relations objectives:

- (1) Press agency/publicity model – This first stage of public relations (PR) was developed by P.T. Barnum in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. PR was utilized as a propaganda function and publicized the organization with half-truths, inaccurate or half true information (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 22; 28).
- (2) Public information model – Ivy Lee, one of the best known early practitioners of PR created this model in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The purpose of this model is to disseminate information, rather than persuade. The PR practitioner

served as an in-house journalist whose job was to objectively report information on their organization (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 22-23; 31).

- (3) Two-way asymmetric model – This model is similar to the press agent/publicist although the authors described it as ‘scientific persuasion.’ PR practitioners use research and knowledge from the social sciences about attributes and behavior to persuade publics to accept the organization’s viewpoint and to follow the ideas of the organization (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 22).
- (4) Two-way symmetric model – The PR practitioner serves as a communications intermediary between the organization and its publics. The goal is to foster understanding between the two groups. The practitioner may use social science theory, but they primarily utilize theories of communications rather than theories of persuasion for planning and evaluation of public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 22). Grunig and Hunt found that the two-way symmetric model was most effective in that it requires continual research and evaluation to reach the critical stage of understanding between the two groups.

According to McCleneghan (2000), SID’s are not considered part of the management team and are still classified in the press agent/publicity model environment. Research indicated SID’s are treated as mere writers of press releases, rather than members of executive staff who can influence athletic department policy (McCleneghan, 1995). To change that perception, McCleneghan deemed it important to understand the communicative traits of the SID in order for them to succeed in their desire to achieve this stated public relations objective (Cutlip et al., 1994).

Of vital interest is the relationship between the “communicative dispositions” of SID’s and how those traits are viewed by AD’s (McCleneghan, 1995). To study the communication personalities of SID’s, McCleneghan (2000) utilized the four trait scale measurements developed by McCroskey & Richmond (1982, 1987, and 1993) to study the communication abilities of SID’s. Each of these sociometric scales was found to be reliable and internal construct validity was established by Downs and Down (1989). The constructs include:

- (1) Shyness Personality Trait – The concept of shyness, or the absence of talk, was developed by McCroskey and Richmond (1982). Those who scored high on this scale supposedly talk less than others. However, there is no evidence of how fear or anxiety factor into this sociometric scale. Therefore, this scale is only a measure of how individuals perceive their own talking behavior tendencies (McCleneghan, 2000).
- (2) Willingness to Communicate Personality Trait – The concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) was developed by McCroskey and Richmond (1987). They found this as a predisposition to be aggressive with communication –as opposed to avoiding – communication. It was found that individuals who are more willing to communicate are more likely to initiate communication with others when they have a choice in the situation. The WTC scale assesses how willing the respondents are to communicate under a number of communication contexts and types of receivers. (McCleneghan, 2000).
- (3) Assertive-Responsive Personality Trait – Richmond and McCroskey (1992) stated that socio-communicative style is composed of two dimensions – assertiveness and responsiveness.
- (4) Compulsive Personality Trait – The concept of the compulsive personality trait measure, or “talkaholic scale,” was advanced by McCroskey and Richmond (1993). The construct is based on four characteristics: 1. Compulsiveness – talkaholics are more than verbal; they are compulsively verbal; 2. Self-Awareness – despite being aware that their talking behavior is seen as excessive by others, the talkaholic does little to alter talking behavior even if it is brought to their attention; 3. Highly Deviant – the expression of this behavior is present in nearly every communication context; 4. Continuation of Talking – talkaholics will continue to communicate even when it may not be in their best interests.

After evaluating SID's on each of these communication traits, McCleneghan (1995) reported “professionalization” in the SID field is a “bumpy” one and may not get smoother (p. 32), and that future advancement opportunities for the SID would

be an uphill challenge. McCleneghan (2000) concludes that in today's college athletics market, SID's are treated as publicists/press agents. Wilcox, Ault, and Agee (1995) noted educators who write textbooks identify the SID as a publicist/press agent. McCleneghan (2000) stated this categorization might be the reason little attention has been paid to the SID in scholarly research in the public relations context.

Neupauer's 1999 study of SID personality traits is similar to McCleneghan's investigation of communicative traits in sports information directors. Neupauer delimited his study to sports information directors at 'big' (or Division I) Eastern universities, and 'small' (or Division I-AA, II, III and NAIA institutions). He also draws on the sociometric instrument work of McCroskey and Richmond, the identical method employed by McCleneghan.

After mailing to 90 East Coast SID's, Neupauer received 61 usable surveys, and on all four scales, there was no significant difference between 'big' and 'small' school SID's in their communicative traits. SID's at Division I institutions were found to be slightly less shy and were comparable to those employed at Division I-AA, II, III and NAIA schools on the Willingness to Talk (WTC) scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1992). He also stated the two SID groups were not significantly different on the Responsiveness and Assertiveness Scale and the Talkaholic scale. He concluded those studying college athletics need to: 1) define the SID's role in today's intercollegiate athletics scene, 2) document what personality traits best fit those undergraduates for the SID role, and 3) make sure they are prepared to handle the job (Neupauer, 1999).

The latest research (McCleneghan 1995, 2000) indicated SID's are treated by AD's as primarily writers of press releases, rather than members of executive staff who can influence athletic department policy. This finding may indicate that the most effective function of an SID in college athletics may be as a communications technician. The Public Relations Society of America has stated it wants all accredited members to be in management roles where they consult CEOs and direct staffs. McCleneghan noted for SID's to succeed in their desire to achieve this stated public relations objective, practitioners must know specifically what communicative

skills they must acquire (Cutlip et al., 1994). Therefore, further study of what would be the most effective PR function – as communications professional or communications technician – must be undertaken.

### Role Typology Framework

Broom and Smith (1979) developed a typology of roles (See Figure 5) in an effort to examine client satisfaction as it related to the role played by consulting public relations practitioners (Stoldt, 1998). Broom and Smith identified five model roles for the public relations practitioner. First is the Expert Prescriber, where the PR consultant acts as an authority on both the public relations problem and the solution. Senior management defers to the expert/authority on public relations

<b>Role Typology</b>	<b>Public Relations Function</b>
<b>Expert Prescriber</b>	Acts as authority on PR problem and the solution; senior management defers to them as expert/authority
<b>Communication Technician</b>	Handles technical aspects of production; Involved in implementation of decisions/plans
<b>Communication Facilitator</b>	Operates as a 'go-between' in PR matters between internal and external publics
<b>Problem-Solving Process Facilitator</b>	Maintains a collaborative relationship with management; Applies systematic methods to solve problems; Part of senior management

### **Figure 5. Broom and Smith's Four-Step Role Typology Model**

From "Testing the Practitioner's Impact on Clients," by G.M. Broom and G.D. Smith, 1979, In *Public Relations Review*, 5(3), 47-59.

matters and has little active involvement. Second is the Communication Technician, where the practitioner handles the technical aspects of producing a finished product (writing, photography, graphic design, broadcast production, publication production, research, event management and fund-raising. They are involved in the



implementation of decisions and plans made by others (Dozier, 1981). Third is the Communication Facilitator, where the practitioner operates as a 'go-between' or information mediator. They maintain a two-way flow of information between the organization and its internal and external publics. Fourth is the Problem-Solving Process Facilitator (PSPF), where the practitioner is in a "collaborative relationship" with the organization where they help apply a systematic problem-solving process.

Because of this direct relationship with senior management, the PSP Facilitator is considered as a part of management. Finally, Broom and Dozier (1979) list the Acceptant Legitimizer, where the PR person is in a non-directive supportive role and not involved in the public relations decision or consulted on any policy decisions.

The first four role models were widely adapted and the fifth was discarded according to Stoldt (1998) because of its "problematic vagaries." Broom and Dozier (1986) noted a variation of the application of the four roles. They stated a practitioner performs all four roles in the execution of their job duties at some point, but work out of a dominant role with more frequency than the others. Thus, they are classified based on which role is predominant in their job function.

However, Dozier applied factor analysis to preexisting data from Broom and Smith (1979) in order to suggest specific organizational roles for practitioners. Dozier established four role factors, the first two of which are similar to the original role models: 1) Communication Manager, 2) Communication Technician, 3) Media Relations, and 4) Communication Liaison.

Subsequent work by other researchers (Dozier, 1981, Broom & Dozier, 1986), and others who studied different aspects of the four role original role models found that the seminal work by Broom and Smith (1979) had become the baseline standard (Cutlip et al., 1994, Grunig & Hunt, 1984, and Newsom, Scott, & Turk, 1993).

Stoldt (1998) stated Broom continued his research on the four roles and found a high correlation among the expert prescriber, communication facilitator and problem-solving process facilitator roles. Broom (1982) concluded PR practitioners thought of themselves in only two of the roles – manager and technician or a

combination of the other three roles. Researchers at Washington State University and The University of Texas at Austin replicated Broom's study using his role typology instrument, and this testing produced similar results, which equate to high validity for Broom's work.

Multiple studies examined Broom and Smith's (1979) four-role typology model from different perspectives (client satisfaction, relationship between the practitioner's role and their individual belief systems, roles and their decision-making opportunities within the organization, career advancement, education, organizational environment), and each study utilized the two-role model as a dominant framework. Toth, Serini, Wright, & Emig (1998) wrote that the work of Broom (1982) argued for a two-role typology of manager and technician so we could learn how specific roles linked to the organization's management structure.

Stoldt (1998) adapted Broom and Smith's (1979) four-role typology model for his study on the current and ideal roles of sport information directors with permission from Dr. Broom. Stoldt noted SID work is task-driven so Broom and Smith's instrument was appropriate. He established five research questions. First, what were the self-described current roles of sports information practitioners. Second, what characteristics of sports information directors and their institutions were related to the current roles they play? Third, what differences existed between the self-described roles which sports information practitioners reported they currently play and the roles they would ideally play. Fourth, how did the current roles of SID's relate to job satisfaction? Finally, how did the discrepancies, which existed between current and ideal roles, relate to job satisfaction?

The analysis of data from Stoldt's (1998) study of Division I-A sports information directors found that 63.3% of SID's viewed themselves as technicians. As already indicated, technicians are not considered part of the management function in intercollegiate athletics by AD's. 24.1% of SID's viewed themselves as expert prescribers, 9.0% viewed themselves as problem-solving process facilitators, and 3.6% viewed themselves as communication facilitators. Stoldt found high correlations between the four role scores that indicate each role is not necessarily distinct from the others. Another finding was that almost one-quarter of respondents

considered themselves as an expert prescriber. The expert prescriber, as defined above, is the person management relies upon to make all public relations decisions. Correlated with the high technician ranking, it can be concluded SID's do not view themselves as part of senior management. A conclusive statistic that confirms the findings of McCleneghan (1995) and Stoldt (1998) is that only 25% of SID's view themselves as an expert communicator, which is the highest level of public relations activity.

An unexpected finding from Stoldt's (1998) study was an indication of role conflict. Schultz and Schultz (1990, p. 415) stated "role conflict can occur when the job does not meet expectations ... (it) arises when a disparity exists in job requirements or between the job's demand and the employee's values and expectations." AD's will hold an SID accountable for a public relations action, or adverse reaction (such as a media problem), yet provide the SID a limited channel for input into management decisions that may affect their long-term job employability. Another finding of the Stoldt (1998) study was that when role conflict exists in the workplace, it coincides with work overload. Previous research (McCleneghan, 1995, Siegel, 1992) indicated stress, burnout and turnover are a constant in sports information work.

Stoldt's study also found SID's to have a high power motive. McClelland (1976) described three variables, which relate to motivation: 1) the need for power, 2) the need to achieve and 3) the need to be well liked. SID's, according to Stoldt, are willing to accept a greater amount of job responsibility (Internet, on-line services, greater media channels). However, their desire to be involved in management tasks and continue to perform a high rate of technical tasks is unrealistic. Schultz and Schultz (1990) mention the importance of management clearly stating what they expect of employees and placing its employees in settings in which they can succeed. Stoldt pointed out SID's cannot become part of management if they do not jettison some of the technician roles.

### Variables Affecting SID Job Performance

Several other factors that influence the job performance of the SID must be factored into the discussion of sports public relations. These are significant because Stoldt, Miller, & Comfort (2001) discussed if the mountain of SID technical tasks can preclude them from assuming a management role. The sports information office is seen as a dumping ground or 'catch all' place, and consequentially, excessive burnout and low morale has resulted (McCleneghan, 1995; Stoldt, 2000). A widening gap between the SID and the media, a proliferation of the usage of modern technology, and a major chasm in the relationship between athletic management and coaching staffs, has created a tenuous instability in the college sports information director's job (McCleneghan, 1995).

With added responsibilities, sports information workers are trying to be as efficient as possible when it comes to their duties. While technology can take much of the grunt work out of media relations (Technology transforms, 1993), it has also created some problems. Money is tight and many business managers, concentrating on the bottom line, have a hard time giving up the money needed in order for the technology to be helpful. As a result, sports information departments are often left with the slowest and most outdated equipment even though they are the ones who need it the most. Additional problem areas were the increased job volume due to the growth of media (cable TV, radio all-talk sports shows, specialized print vehicles and the Internet), and a more recent phenomenon – the loss of talented newcomers to start up dot.com's and other Internet companies (Clancy, 2000; McCleneghan, 1995). McCleneghan (2000) noted entry level hiring in mass communication has become more difficult because of the job expectations of "Generation X." Today's college graduates expected a 9-5 environment with more job benefits than ever. However, the job description of a sports information director is not compatible with those expectations (McCleneghan, 2000).

Like many administrative fields in athletics, salaries in sports information can be quite low, especially when factoring in the high number of hours required to perform the many tasks (Michaels, 1993). Athletic administrators face a new threat

to keep SID staff members motivated when they feel under appreciated. This task is especially difficult because entry-level workers are likely to leave due to the lure of better money. Another area that would be beneficial to SID's is additional job "perks" (Bovet, 1993). Individuals who enter the sports information field are naturally motivated to some degree. They have to be because it doesn't take long for them to realize that sports information is not a glamorous field. Money is important, but it is not everything. What workers want is reassurances about job security and loyalty (Farinelli, 1992).

The motivational problems faced by the sports information director leads to turnover (Siegel, 1992). He noted some managers do nothing about employee turnover because it is expected today due to declining loyalty, upward mobility and the "me" generation. Others take a contrary approach believing that employee turnover upsets client relations, damages employee morale and takes valuable time away from client service (Siegel, 1992).

Siegel suggested seven strategies to keep and motivate good employees:

1. Employees must be proud of where they work
2. Employees must feel their voice counts
3. Recognize good work, and recognize it often
4. Create a positive, upbeat work environment
5. Have fun. Work hard, but have fun
6. Challenge employees to grow professionally
7. Ensure compensation and benefits are fair

Based on the literature, retaining an SID should be a challenge for today's athletic administrators. This task is especially difficult because entry-level workers are likely to leave due to the lure of better money, better hours and less stressful employment. The many motivational problems faced by the sports information director invariably leads to turnover (Siegel, 1992). Other factors like burnout, the increased work load brought on by expanding technology, a growing lack of respect for SID's by upper athletic management, and the chronic "long hours, low pay," scenarios (McCleneghan, 1995) have been found. A deterioration of relationships with the media and coaches (Clancy, 2000), underscores why SID's are leaving the field, and why it has become more difficult to attract young men and women to the

profession (McCleneghan, 2000). A problem with attracting individuals to sports information who possess both the management and technical skills to perform this complicated job is the increasing lack of respect managers place on the professional role of an SID. If AD's believe the SID is not suited for management, they will not be trained or guided in that leadership dimension (McCleneghan, 2000).

Research conducted on the public relations field in the business community (which is more established and recognized than college sports information), found that while CEOs recognize public relations as a vital factor in the success of their enterprise, the profession has still not made its way into the boardroom on a par with specialties such as accounting, law, or finance (Winokur, 2000).

Robert Eaton, former CEO of Chrysler remarked, "public relations is an integral part of our senior management decision-making and we look to PR for direction on the best ways to communicate positive news on the industry and company issues" (Winokur, 2000, p. 21). However, Eaton also stated, "too many people still think of 'flackery,' press agency, and long lunches as the modus operandi for the public relations practitioner. PR needs to develop an image campaign for PR" (p. 22). Eaton on one hand praises the public relations person as a valued senior staff member, yet then states the PR industry needs to conduct an image campaign on itself.

Additional problem areas identified by McCleneghan (1995) were the increased job volume due to the growth of media (cable TV, radio all-talk sports shows, specialized print vehicles and the internet), high burnout rates, a limited job market for newcomers due to the substantial use of graduate assistants and interns to do full-time work, and a more recent phenomenon – the loss of talented newcomers to start up dot.com's and other internet companies. Clancy (2000) noted college graduates are more apt to be employed by a dot.com than any other communications business today. Also, the destruction of the line of communications between SID's and the media because of the proliferation of faxes and personal computers, and the increasing hostility between SID's and coaches over sports coverage, have created a tenuous instability in the college sports information director's job (McCleneghan, 1995). Although the drain of SIDs

by the high tech industry is not as severe as the late 1990's, the research is still relevant because of the lure of jobs paying better that include a traditional 40 hour work week. Athletic management must also address the other factors to prevent a heavy talent drain away from the field of sports public relations.

In Neupauer's (1999) study of the personality traits of sports information directors, he found that athletic directors and public relations educators think the SID is nothing more than a 'technician.' He based that conclusion on observations of a new generation of undergraduate public relations majors who want to assume the SID role. However, Neupauer stated we must 1) define the SID's role in today's intercollegiate athletics scene, 2) document what personality traits best fit those undergraduates for the SID role, and, 3) make sure they are prepared to handle the job.

Neupauer (1998) also examined the gender issue of women in the sports information profession and concluded women face many difficulties in a business that is roughly 80% male. The study, which surveyed women the SID profession, pointed out numerous job difficulties related to gender. He found it was difficult for women to balance a professional and personal life due to the long hours involved. Female SID's surveyed noted having a family was a major strain on familial relationships. Glass ceilings into upper management were also reported. Neupauer concluded there was not a bias that prevented women from entering the SID profession, but rather, a job whose requirements are not conducive to women with families. Women have been steadily entering the sports information field, but many leave because of the difficulty of trying to have a family and being able to spend quality time with them. The attraction of other higher paying professions with better hours has also drawn women away from the profession.

In summary, public relations is "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip et al., 1994, p. 34). McCleneghan (1995) found that athletic management has a deep lack of respect for SID's and their job was viewed as a line staff function rather than a management function. He suggests professional accreditation through the Public Relations Society of America

(PRSA) could help the sports information profession obtain higher credibility with athletic management. Also, McCleneghan's research found that SID's, who do not report directly to the athletic director, but rather to other internal managers, are insulated from internal politics and are better able to perform their duties more professionally. This research is vital as a foundational basis for what is a very young body of literature written on sports information directors and how public relations practitioners should be part of management structure.

#### Perceptions of SID's by AD's

McCleneghan's (1995) finding that AD's do not have a profound respect for the sports information director is significant because it conflicts with the foundational purposes of PR, which is to advise management and be part of policy-making for the organization. McCleneghan's assertion that AD's view the sports information director's position as a staff function, rather than a management function, lends credibility to Stoldt's (1998) hypothesis that the SID is a communications technician, rather than a manager.

Another national study (Stoldt, 2000) found two potential reasons why sports information professionals are not being utilized as managers. The first was that sports information professionals are not being given the opportunity to be part of the management team. The second implication was that the sports information directors lack the expertise to play predominately management roles. The first possibility is more likely according to Stoldt (2000), because scholars describe sports information work as being primarily technical in nature (Helitzer, 1996, McCleneghan, 1995). Also, a lack of respect from athletic management and other university administrators is a common problem (Stoldt, 2000).

In an open letter to members of CoSIDA in 2000, Rick Brewer, a former SID at the University of North Carolina, discussed the issue of lack of involvement in senior management in athletics by SID's:

"I often feel overwhelmed by the significant new responsibilities they have accepted. SID's also feel excluded from senior management. I am not sure the SID is held in the same regard he or she was years ago, particularly at the Division I level. The approach to managing college athletics has become more business-like,



and while you certainly could argue that it's more sophisticated and perhaps more efficient, I do not believe it has enhanced the standing of the SID." (Brewer, 2000, p. 10).

Stoldt et al. (2001) conducted what is perhaps the most significant study to examine the perceptions of SID's by athletic directors. The authors surveyed athletic directors at Division I, II and III institutions (N = 133) to examine the key relationships with various constituent groups served by SID's, and other public relations issues confronting their programs. The study discussed six variables from which to draw inferences on the AD/SID relationship: Their study sought data in six primary areas: (1) department officer most involved in public relations activities; (2) frequency of communication with SID's about public relations issues; (3) frequency with which SID's are included in senior staff meetings; (4) ratings of sports information staff's ability to perform public relations tasks; (5) benefits received from public relations activities; and (6) rating of strength of program's relationship with constituents

Three "broad implications" emerged from the study pertinent to athletic administrators and sport management scholars:

(1) AD's view a sports information/practitioner (an SID or an associate/assistant athletics director for media relations) as their department's officer most involved in public relations activities. Stoldt et al. (2001) noted this finding was expected and also validated prior research by Stoldt (2000) that found SID's saw themselves as communication technicians. Data from the same study of AD's (Stoldt 2000) concluded AD's assigned a higher rating to their SID's abilities to perform technical tasks, such as producing sports information materials and maintaining media contacts rather than performing managerial tasks. This research confirmed Stoldt's (2000) assertion that although SID's are the department's primary public relations officer, AD's do not maximize the full potential of the SID as they mostly only utilize their technical communications skills. Top public relations officers must play a top managerial role if their organizations are to move toward excellence in communication (Dozier et al., 1995). Jackowski (2000, p. 40) described the sports manager-subordinate relationship in public relations as:

“The media relations goal of obtaining positive publicity has turned sports public relations departments into one-way information disseminators ... This strategy has created the perception of today’s public relations professionals as spin doctors adept at manipulating the truth. Consequently, the management function on which organizations rely to create a positive reputation for themselves is already saddled with its own PR problem.”

Members of CoSIDA confirmed Jackowski’s observation citing lack of “image/respect” as one of the top three issues facing the organization/profession (CoSIDA Workshop Survey Results, 2000). Stoldt et al. (2001) found that AD’s perceive the SID as important parts of the athletic program. A majority of respondents to the AD survey (70.7%) said they spoke with their SID at least once a week on public relations matters; 78.7% of AD’s reported that their SID was always or at least regularly included in senior staff meetings and 90.5% of AD’s said the SID made substantial contributions to those meetings. One finding Stoldt et al. (2001) found to indicate a lack of SID contributions to senior management was that 56.7% of the respondents did not have crisis management plans. Additionally, of those programs that did have crisis plans, 17.9% did not include the SID as part of the crisis management team. Stoldt (2000) noted a crisis management plan is the best way to reduce exposure to damaging public relations issues. The inclusion of a media relations specialist in the crisis-management team is a necessity (Helitzer, 1996; Stoldt et al. 2001). These findings confirm the need for the SID to be part of the athletics management team.

A second finding of the Stoldt et al. (2001) study related to the AD’s perception of the benefits of public relations in athletics. The authors found that AD’s believed their programs received a wide range of benefits from their public relations efforts (sports information and community relations). However, the study found that AD’s did not believe the public relations function resulted in additional revenue for the program, but were more likely to result in better publicity and relationships with outside constituencies. Dozier et al. (1995) countered the AD’s view by noting that a direct link exists between sound constituent relationships and increased financial benefits. Stoldt et al. (2001) attempted to establish a link between the perceived value of public relations activity by the AD and the financial

implications for the athletics department. They stated only 33.8% of AD's provided both public relations budget figures and estimates of the financial value of their public relations activities. The low response rate on this issue was found to be problematic for SID's according to Stoldt et al. (2001), because the AD's do not perceive that public relations activities result in increased revenue for their programs. The authors also denote the problems with quantifying the financial benefits of PR activities, but Dozier et al. (1995) stated a direct link exists between sound relationships with important constituents and increased revenue for the organization.

A final implication of the Stoldt et al. (2001) study was that the Internet was the most important concern to AD's for the future. Levin (2000) found that college athletics administrators and SID's are fighting to keep up with the demands for information through their websites.

Research on the relationship between the athletic director and the sports information director in college athletics is highly limited. Less than five scholars have examined the public relations context and where the SID is most effective in the organizational structure of athletic programs. McCleneghan (1995), and Stoldt et al. (2001) are the two primary studies that have examined the AD/SID dyadic relationship of superior and subordinate. Although their findings are conclusive, validity questions remain. Can results from two studies be used to generalize about a population of over 1,500 university and college SID's? The current study will use a qualitative approach to study the organizational communication patterns in college athletics and to seek the cultural themes and patterns that emerge from the data collected from NCAA Division I-A athletic directors on the dyadic relationship between the AD and the SID.

### Summary

Research on the communicative culture inside a major NCAA football-playing university's sports information office is negligible. This dissertation represents a groundbreaking effort to conduct an ethnography of communication of the sports information office at a Division I-A program to bridge the knowledge gap between

sport ethnographic research by scholars like Robert Sands and more traditional quantitative studies on sports information directors by Clay Stoldt, Sean McCleneghan, and Nicholas Neupauer.

To accomplish this task, three theoretical frameworks have been presented. First we have examined the development of culture, more specifically sport culture, in modern society. We have shown how the application of theory to cultural studies directly relates to comprehending the meaning of sport culture through the eyes of the ethnographer. Second, communication theories, which define the process of how we communicate, have been presented to help evaluate the need for interpersonal communication and how relationships are valuable in our daily lives. Finally, a review of the available scholarly literature on sports information directors and the limited amount of theory development in this subject area has been presented.

A blending of an understanding of the development and meaning of sport culture, along with a comprehension of how we communicate each day, establishes the theoretical framework for the study of the communicate culture of our target subjects – the sports information personnel at Southeastern State University.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter is designed to outline the methodological techniques that will be used to collect and analyze data during a three-month ethnographic study of the Southeastern State University sports information office. A thorough explanation of the heuristic approach in phenomenological research, where the researcher draws upon intense personal experience to frame the examination of the target group, will start the chapter. Other sections to be included in the chapter include the origins of ethnography, its definition, and how it will be utilized to conduct a sport ethnographic study. The open-ended nature of qualitative research fires the debate over the naturalistic method of research versus that of positivism. An explanation of why a naturalistic ethnography will be used by the researcher is included in this chapter.

An ethnography of communication is a specialized type of research where ethnographic methods are applied to the communication patterns of a group, specifically the SSU sports information office. This form of ethnography provides the primary methodological framework that will assist in the examination of the communicative culture of the SID office at the conclusion of the study.

Additionally, the research design, strategy and process of this ethnographic study will be discussed in detail. Data collection will be chronicled in the ethnographic record, which is the compilation of field notes, transcripts of audio recordings, reviews of SID artifacts and documents and other methods of communication used by the sports information staff. The actual processes in the record like participant observation; interviews and a review of documents, symbols, rituals and icons will be highlighted in the chapter.

The methods for data analysis, which include coding the large amount of field notes, interview transcripts and sport artifacts, are explained. Finally, ethical issues such as trustworthiness of the data, the credibility of the researcher, the control of bias, and the maintenance of confidentiality for the study participants at the end of the study are other components of this chapter.

### Overview

The study of communication patterns within intercollegiate athletics has not generated a wide range of scholarly research. This dissertation will examine the communication patterns, symbols, icons and rituals that emerge from daily interactions in the sports information (SID) office at Southeastern State University (SSU), a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I-A football-playing institution. The SSU SID office has a director with the title of Assistant Athletic Director for media relations. He has four full-time assistants, a full-time secretary, and three graduate SID's in addition to a staff of 14 student interns. The SSU study will seek to discover norms and rules of internal communicative exchanges among the sports information (SID) staff. In brief, I aim to discover the communication culture in this group.

The chapter begins with an introduction to the ethnographic method, which will be utilized in this study. The researcher will engage in a three-month ethnographic study using participant observation methodology combined with interviews to examine the culture, individual relationships, and the symbols, rituals and other icons of the sports public relations business. Analysis of the data collected through field notes and audio recordings should divulge the communicative culture of the SID office.

Numerous sport ethnographic studies have been conducted, but this study marks the first effort to examine sports information directors longitudinally. Books like *From Red Ink to Roses* (Telander, 1994), *Friday Night Lights* (Bissinger, 1990), *A Civil War: Army vs. Navy* (Feinstein, 1996), *Hockey Night in Canada* (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993), and *A Season On The Brink* (Feinstein, 1986) are excellent examples of a researcher immersing themselves in the sporting culture and then

reporting the ensuing cultural patterns that emerge. This dissertation will be a reflection of the methods used by those authors to evaluate a different sporting entity.

Sands (2002, p. 150) stated, "sport reflects culture and culture reflects sport." In his book *Sport Ethnography*, Sands argued that sport has become a dominant part of contemporary human society. He notes that many cultural anthropologists dismiss the study of sport culture as being trivial with regard to the overall study of human behavior, which is routed through religion, economic or political systems, or even language. He posits, "sport is pervasive and never ceasing, casting giant shadows on other facets of life. For a culture, a world to go crazy over a ball game, a camel race, a lacrosse match, a run, speaks volumes about human behavior" (p. 150).

The evolution of the study of sport and society has not been fully recognized by anthropology departments today. Sands (2002) noted there are few academic courses in sport and culture in anthropology and there are even less presentations at major anthropology conferences. However, other academic disciplines are offering many more classes in sport and culture that seek to explain the prominence of sport in modern society. Sands (1999, p. 11) explained this further:

"Sport has been and will always be a significant element of cultural behavior, in our own backyard as well as in emerging Third World countries and long-standing tribal societies. Sport also reflects the enormous amount of cultural change through the impact of Westernization occurring in every corner of the globe ... In essence, sport has become both a barometer of social change and a leading agent of social change ... it is also an extremely large window in which to peer into the tickings and cultural variation of humankind. Anthropology seeks not the differences, but the similarities that lurk beneath the highly visible cultural expression that makes us all members of the human species. The study of sport is no different; sport reflects culture, and culture reflects sport."

Sands (2002) posed the following question: Why have we become maniacal over a collection of athletes participating in ritually patterned behavior, repeated over and over down through the ages? The sport business industry is now the sixth largest industry in the United States with revenues of \$213 billion, falling behind only real estate, retail trade, health care, banking and transportation (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). It

could be surmised that sport has become a major part of modern culture when examined through a social, political or economical lens. The fanaticism and massive financial investment in sport reflects the major role sport plays in world culture in our postmodern society.

### Significance of the Study

The significance of this study rests solidly in the fact that this is a groundbreaking effort to understand how communication occurs inside a group where its primary job responsibility is to communicate. As has been demonstrated in the literature review, little research has been conducted on sports information directors. In those studies, only selective issues have been addressed. Role typology frameworks, the variables affecting job performance of the SID, and the perception of the SID by the athletic director are among the limited research studies conducted. This study will use previous research on SID's as a reference point to perform an intense ethnographic evaluation of the culture of a NCAA Division I-A football powerhouse.

In addition, the study will increase the body of knowledge on communications in college athletics and demonstrate qualitatively the communicative culture inside intercollegiate athletics, specifically the sports information office, and the resultant patterns and meanings.

Two central ideas frame the current research. First, the study will examine the communicative patterns that develop between the sports information director, his full-time assistants and graduate and undergraduate assistants as they work in various athletic scenarios (staff meetings, football games, media functions, and informal settings). The goal of the study is to observe the daily operations of the office, how the staff interacts with each other and with external publics, along with athletic administrators, coaches, players, and student-athletes, other Southeastern State departments and the sports news media at large. This qualitative study will provide in-depth knowledge of the leadership style of the SID, and the kind of communication characteristics displayed by the SID and his staff in the dyadic communicative relationship. Second, identification of athletic cultural rituals,



tradition and artifacts that are used and produced in the SID office at this large football playing institution should shed light on the culture of the program. The study will allow the researcher to make recommendations to major university sports information offices about the effectiveness of the communication culture displayed by the subjects of the study.

### The Sports Information Director

The college sports information director has one of the widest ranging job descriptions of any employee in an athletic department. Their duties include gathering, producing, and disseminating news, generating publicity and publications design and production, along with statistics gathering, game management, advertising, fund-raising, special events, and maintaining relations with external publics like boosters, media, and other faculty and staff (Michaels, 1993; Helitzer, 1996). An effective sports information director must be highly motivated, persistent and a creative administrator, as well as diplomatic and intelligent. Sports information personnel are individuals whose mission is to promote and publicize the intercollegiate athletic program (Davis, 1978; Helitzer, 1996).

Research indicates that modern-era duties like web publishing, electronic databases, and live Internet broadcasts, have increased the workload for SID staffs (McCleneghan, 2000). In reality, an SID's primary job functions are sufficient to keep them busy for 40+ hours a week. McCleneghan (1995) conducted a benchmark study to research two concepts: (1) the demographic background, salaries, job duties, concerns, job difficulties, and the internal and external publics of the sports information director; and (2) the attitudes of athletic management toward college sports information directors. His work was the first to investigate this specific sub-field of public relations. The majority of research on SID's has focused on communications skills and the relationship they have with athletic directors. This dissertation will investigate the communication patterns utilized inside the SID office, relationships between the SID and his staff, the use of cultural symbols and icons and whether the allegations of operating in a culture of isolationism can be supported.

## Theoretical Framework

A heuristic approach to the study will be conducted because of my previous employment experience as an SID. As noted in Patton (2002), heuristics is a form of phenomenological research, which draws upon the intense personal experience of the researcher to frame the examination of the sample. It refers to a process of internal searching through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis (Patton, 2002). During my years as a college sports information director, I worked with many different types of SID's and institutions. My training as a journalist has honed the observational skills, which will be essential in producing a quality ethnographic portrayal of the SSU sports information office. The opportunity to study the SSU SID office in fine detail should reveal rich data that will allow for observations of the emergent communication patterns, especially at a powerhouse football institution. Patton's description of how the researcher needs to develop self-awareness and self-knowledge perfectly describes the researcher's desire to conduct the study and keep an open mind to potential tensions within the SID office.

Heuristics places great value on the personal experience of the researcher because it allows them to have a deep insight into the phenomenon through shared experience and a familiarity with the environment studied. The four major differences between heuristics and phenomenology noted by Douglass and Moustakas (1985) are worth reviewing: 1) heuristics emphasizes connectedness and relationship while phenomenology encourages more detachment; 2) heuristics leads to depictions of essential meanings and portrayal of the intrigue and personal significance while phenomenology emphasizes specific descriptions; 3) heuristics concludes with a creative synthesis while phenomenology presents a distillation of the structures of experience, and 4) in heuristics, the research participants remain visible in the examination of the data and are portrayed as whole people, while in phenomenology the persons are lost in the descriptive analysis (in Patton, 2002 p. 108-109). Patton concluded the researcher is the primary instrument in the

qualitative inquiry, and this is sometimes challenged because it is converse to the traditional method of objectivity and detachment in academic research. I would disagree, because personal insight can be highly valuable in recognizing the subtle nuances that an untrained observer might not be able to recognize.

### An Ethnographic Study

Ethnography is founded in the tradition of anthropology and is “devoted to describing ways of life of humankind, a social scientific description of a people and the cultural basis of their peoplehood” (Peacock, 1986, p. 32). A hallmark of cultural anthropology, ethnography is classified as a selection of research methods that allow the researcher to “grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, and to realize his vision of his world” (Malinowski, 1922, as cited in Spradley, 1980, p. 5). It is also one of the most basic forms of social research because of its long history and closely resembles the routine ways people make sense of the world in everyday life (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Malinowski, the first person to conduct an ethnographic study, noted an expectation for the researcher to find understanding by learning to see, think, feel, and sometimes even behave as an insider, or “native.” Going native, or immersing oneself in the study setting, must be done because of the “experiential approach” in which the research acquires entrance into the society they study (Tedlock, in Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). Freilich (1970) suggested the term “marginal native,” or “professional stranger,” (Agar, 1981), or “self-denying emissaries” (Boon, 1982). The researcher should maintain a polite distance from the subjects, yet cultivate rapport, identification and trust so as not to run the risk of acquiring “complete membership,” or “going native” (Adler & Adler, 1987).

Ethnographic research should begin with a problem or set of issues, or what Malinowski (1922) called “foreshadowed problems.” However, the researcher must not be burdened by “preconceived notions,” or pre-determined ideas,” because upon setting out to prove a certain hypothesis, if the researcher is unable to change his views constantly and cast off previous theories when evidence is found to support other ideas, the research would be worthless (Malinowski, 1922, as cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 24). Therefore, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995)

noted the purpose of ethnography is to produce descriptions and explanations of particular phenomena, or with developing theories rather than with testing existing hypotheses.

To effectively study a people group, the researcher must participate in activities, ask questions, eat strange foods, learn a new language, watch ceremonies, taking field notes, wash clothes, interviewing informants and many other things (Spradley, 1980). The many varied field activities must not obscure the researcher's primary goal, which is fundamental to all fieldwork – doing ethnography.

Spradley (1980) stated simply that ethnography means learning from people. To learn from other people (through the process of studying their culture), the researcher must have a thorough understanding of three fundamental aspects of the human experience: What people do, what people know, and the things people make and use (Spradley, 1980). When these three foundational items are shared within a group, and the group interacts together for a period of time, a culture will evolve. Spradley (1980) noted the by-products of that interaction are *cultural behavior*, *cultural knowledge*, and *cultural artifacts*. Thus, the goal of ethnographic fieldwork is to distinguish among the three. The method of interpreting these concepts is best described by famed ethnographer Clifford Geertz (1973), who stated interpreting culture is 'thick description,' in which interpreters describe cultural practices from the 'native's point of view.'

Tedlock, (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), noted that ethnography is an attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into meaningful context. It combines research design, fieldwork, and other research methods to produce historically, politically, and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives. It is not simply generating new information or research; it is a continual process of examining new experiences, occurrences and daily happenings with a critical eye and then generating a written recollection of the results. The term ethnography is used to refer to both a product (a research study for example), and a process (a long-term way to study human culture). As a process, it can be characterized as: 1) phenomenological, 2) inductive, 3) constructive, and 4) generative. It could be considered

phenomenological because it represents a worldview of the participants, inductive because it is concerned with developing a theory to explain what is found through repetitive observations, constructive because it is aimed at discovering what analytical constructs or categories can be elicited from the stream of behavior, and generative because it is the foundation on which other theory is built and grounded (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981, p. 4-6). A better description of the day-to-day, week-to-week, month-to-month ethnographic method is provided by Agar (1981, p. 6):

“ ... In ethnography ... you learn something (“collect some data”), then you try to make sense out of it (“analysis”), then you go back and see if the interpretation makes sense in light of new experience (“collect more data”), then you refine your interpretation (“more analysis”), and so on. The process is dialectic, not linear. Such a simple statement, so important in capturing a key aspect of doing ethnography ... “

It is not a centrally constructed research methodology because it is located between autobiography and the expansiveness of cultural analysis (Tedlock, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Because of this complexity, the researcher must migrate between territorial and semantic boundaries, constructing cultures and understandings through observation and interaction with the group.

### A Naturalistic Ethnography

The open-ended nature of ethnographic research has stimulated vigorous debate among scholars. At odds are those who subscribe to the naturalistic method of ethnography and those who are guided by positivism, or the use of the scientific method for the testing of theories (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This is related to grounded theory where following data collection, theories emerge from the researcher's observations and interviews out in the real world rather than in the laboratory (Patton, 2002). A working comprehension of these two methodological structures is essential before selecting one to conduct the study.

Naturalistic inquiry, or ‘discovery oriented’ phenomenological research, is unique in that it takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest (Guba, 1978, Dobbert, 1982, Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Naturalism demands the researcher adopt an

attitude of 'respect' or 'appreciation towards the social world (Dobbert, 1982, Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Devotion to the study participants, not the blind subscription to a particular set of methodological principles no matter how strongly supported by philosophical arguments, is central to naturalism (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). From the wide range of philosophical and sociological ideas that generated naturalistic inquiry, naturalistic concepts emerged that argued social meanings cannot be understood by simply studying causal relationships; but that human actions are based upon social meanings: the intentions, motives, beliefs, rules, and values of the group (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Positivists would argue the stimulus-response model is sufficient to interpret human behavior. Naturalists go further in their belief that people interpret stimuli, and these individual interpretations are constantly changing as events unfold, to ultimately shape their actions.

In order to understand people's behavior, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argued we must use a naturalistic approach that gives us access to the meanings that guide this behavior. By living close to the culture, we can, as outside observers, acquire a certain objectivity to better interpret the behaviors of the group. High value is placed on finding the existence of variations in cultural patterns across and within societies, and their significance for understanding social processes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Denzin (1978) noted the primary goal of naturalism is to capture the culture from within and understand it. The search for universal laws (theories) is downplayed in favor of detailed accounts of the concrete experience of life within a particular culture. The naturalist resists imposed schemes or models that over-simplify the complexities of everyday life (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

The naturalist approach is in direct contrast to more formal quantitative (positivist) programs where experiments have a pretest and posttest, a comparison of the treatment group to some control group on a limited set of standardized measures. Such rigid designs make assumptions like there is a single, isolated, identifiable and measurable treatment that remains constant and unchanging (Guba, 1978). In real-world settings, where subjects are subject to change and redirection, naturalistic inquiry replaces the fixed treatment/outcome emphasis of the controlled

experiment with a dynamic process that evaluates the day-to-day reality of the participants without trying to manipulate, control or eliminate any situational variables in the study environment (Patton, 2002).

A theoretical approach from qualitative research that is related to the positivist tradition is grounded theory. Grounded theory comes from direct field experience rather than being imposed a priori as in the case of formal hypothesis testing and theory testing (Patton, 2002). The contrast between closed-ended questionnaires and open-ended interviews is the tension in the naturalist/positivist research debate. It is proposed that the naturalistic perspective is the research methodology that will be optimal for this study. As discussed in the literature review on sports information directors, quantitative studies have been conducted (McCleneghan, 1995, Stoldt, 2000, Stoldt, Miller & Comfort, 2001). The results from these research studies have 'pigeon-holed' SID's into what Patton (2002) would call standardized categories. These studies have predetermined categories based on some theory or preordained criteria, according to Patton. This channeling eliminates the possibility of examining rival hypotheses, and anticipated or unmeasured factors that could arise during the fieldwork. Stoldt and McCleneghan examined specific criteria related to the communicative traits of SID's, the job factors affecting their performance, and how they relate to athletic directors.

This dissertation will examine a wider view of the sports information profession. It will begin with no preconceived ideas about how the SID office at Southeastern State University operates. It will not be based on proving or explaining a theory, but will simply observe the SID office from the inside to discover how this unique sports culture communicates. The value of this type of research is great to explain how the primary communicators at one of the United States' predominate football-playing institutions create a culture of communication with their internal and external publics. Although the value of theory is great, for this study, the opportunity to observe, evaluate and analyze this particular group is rare and will be beneficial to the sports public relations profession as a whole.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) discussed the debate about the politics of ethnography and the acceptance/rejection of this methodology by positivists and

naturalists alike. They noted the qualitative approach is becoming more accepted in research and that there have been attempts to structure a combined method with quantitative techniques. However, there are arguments on both sides regarding the philosophical and political presuppositions built into both approaches (Smith & Heshusius, 1986, Smith, 1989, Guba, 1990, in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). It is shown the two share a common thread of being committed to understanding social phenomena. Similarly, they both regard practical and political commitments on the part of the researcher as being irrelevant to the research process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Doubts have been raised about the capacity of ethnography to portray the social world the way the discipline claims it does, and that older forms of ethnography elude the claims of value neutrality.

Some ethnographers embrace the loose confederation of ideas known as critical theory to frame their research (Littlejohn, 1999, Patton, 2002). Critical theory is built on a common interest in the quality of communication and human life, and primarily focuses on inequalities, injustice, subjugation and oppression (Littlejohn, 1999, Patton, 2002). Examples of the critical viewpoint include feminist theory, which examines gender in society, queer theory, which espouses sexual orientation, and other post-modern expressions such as race, ethnicity, and many others. According to Littlejohn, (1999), critical theorists do not merely observe; they also criticize and become activists in societal conflicts and how communication perpetuates domination of one group over another. Borrowing heavily from structuralist and fundamentalist theory, critical theories share elements of these genres, but are primarily interested in examining the social structures that affect class and gender relations.

“A critical social theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system ... Inquiry that aspires to the name *critical* must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society ... Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label *political* and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, pp. 281, 291).



Thus, critical ethnographers are focused on confirmation and elucidation (clarity) rather than discovery. Patton (2002) noted these researchers are oriented to the behaviors because they are leaning in a particular direction or framed from a specific perspective. Intercollegiate athletics can be controversial in some aspects, but the study of the SSU sports information office ultimately will not draw *Sports Illustrated* to the author's door. The intent of this dissertation is not to become active in introducing change to the profession; but rather to discover what the communicative culture of an SID office is really like. To recommend change from an activist perspective would be inappropriate and inconsistent with the purpose of the research.

For this specific study, the SSU SID office is the selected group. This traditional form of ethnographic research began with Geertz' (1973) classic study of Balinese cockfighting. Geertz did not merely study cockfighting, but more importantly, examined the depth that cockfighting was ingrained into the culture of the people. This research played a major role in a revolution of anthropology where scholars began to examine sport seriously in a cultural context (Sands, 2002). Sands described how anthropologists began to embrace this naturalistic perspective in sports ethnography, as studies on female track athletes in China (Brownell, 1995), bodybuilding (Bolin, 1997, Klein, 1988), baseball (Klein, 1991, 1997), Kenyan distance running (Bale & Sang, 1996), and junior-college football (Sands, 1999) emerged. Along with the aforementioned books on Texas high school football, Canadian hockey, and Indiana basketball, other studies began to be published on sport and anthropology. Sands (2002) presented a postmodern argument that Western sport, a recognized global phenomenon, homogenizes identity and culture rather than celebrating the uniqueness and diversity of different sports cultures.

### Ethnography of Communication

The ethnography of communication is the application of ethnographic methods to the communication patterns of a group (Littlejohn, 1999). More simply, the interpreter attempts to make sense of the forms of communication employed by the members of the group or culture. This study of language, both verbal and non-

verbal, spoken and written in its social context, forms the basis for ethnography of communication.

Formed in the traditions of linguistics and anthropology in the 1960's and 1970's by anthropologist Dell Hymes, the ethnography of communication seeks to discover the communicative conduct of a community; this conduct is the unit of analysis in the study. Hymes (1974) suggested formal linguistics is not sufficient by itself to uncover a complete understanding of language because it ignores the highly variable ways in which language is used in everyday communication.

Noted ethnographer Gerry Philipsen (1989) provided four assumptions of the ethnography of communication: 1) participants in a local cultural community create shared meaning, or, they use codes that have some degree of common understanding; 2) communicators in any cultural group must coordinate their actions; there must be some order or system when individuals communicate; 3) meanings and actions are particular to individual cultural groups; and 4) not only are the patterns of behavior and codes different from group to group, but each group also has its own ways of understanding certain codes and actions.

Littlejohn (1999) confirmed all cultures communicate differently, but the messages used by the cultures must have a shared code, communicators who know and use the code, a channel, a setting, a message form, a topic, and an event created by transmission of the message. It must be clear that anything can be a message, but it must be understood as such by the natives (Littlejohn, 1999). He gives the examples of snake handling and baggy pants being communicative messages. The shared codes of snakes and pants could send a clear message to members of the group, while being completely baffling to the outsider. These codes cannot be deciphered without further ethnographic study.

Hymes (1974) proposed that the framework of an ethnography of communication be divided into four aspects. The first three relate to communicative events or the events' components, relationships and capacity within the group. The fourth addresses the system within which these events occur. The event, as described by Hymes (1974), possesses similar components as those mentioned by Littlejohn. Each event contains six components: 1) setting, 2) participants, 3)

message channel, 4) message code, 5) message form, and 6) message content or topic. Once the researcher comprehends what basic forms to watch for in the group, the ethnographic inquiry can begin with ... “the work of discovering what constitutes a communicative event and what classes of events are recognized within a community” (Hymes, 1974, p. 29).

It is clearly noted by Hymes that the system is the primary force that strengthens both the credibility and usefulness of this method. “It is this aspect (activity of the system) that the ethnographic study of communication makes closest contact with the social, political, and moral concerns with communication, conceived as value and a determinant in society and in personal lives” (Hymes, 1974, p. 30). To discover the communicative patterns and meanings in a culture, the community must first be identified, specific communicative events and their components must be recognized, relationships between the individuals and the group must be identified, and a clear understanding of how these events work to define cultural meaning must be recognized.

Donal Carbaugh (1990) wrote that communication ethnography addressed at least three types of problems. First is the discovery of the type of shared identity created by communication in the cultural community. This identity is the members’ sense of who they are as a group and the common qualities the members of the group share. The second problem is finding the shared meanings of public performances seen in the group. Littlejohn (1999) used the examples of cheerleaders at a basketball game, different terminology in black youth culture and fines at Rotary meetings to illuminate the concept. What do these displays mean to the culture in which they are performed? The third is to explore contradictions or paradoxes of the group. A vital process of understanding the cultural community is finding a way to explain why these differences occur and how individual members of the group handle it and still remain part of the community.

Three ways of answering Carbaugh’s questions are provided by Littlejohn (1999). Questions of norms look for the ways communication is used to establish a set of standards and the ways notions of right and wrong affect communication patterns. Next, questions of forms look at the types of communication used with the

cultural group, what behaviors count as communication, and how they are organized. Finally, questions of cultural codes draw attention to the meanings of symbols and behaviors used as communication in the community.

A noteworthy form of ethnography pertinent to the sports information study is performance ethnography. Victor Turner (1987) stated culture in our society is performed, or what the members of a group actually do while participating in daily life. He pointed out that much of the research in ethnographic communication is on what people say. Turner continued by stating everyday life is similar to theatre in that the actors (participants) manipulate various media senses to create meanings. He made it clear that performance is as vital in understanding culture as that of speech. Michael Pacanowsky and Nick O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) mirror Turner's suppositions by stating, "performances are those very actions by which members constitute and reveal their culture to themselves and others" (p. 131). These performances within an organization create a shared reality for the members that distinguish it from other cultures (Morgan, 1986). Understanding these performances and the shared meaning of communication in the group is the goal of ethnographic communication.

Morgan (1986) explains:

"Shared meaning, shared understanding, and shared sense making are all different ways of describing culture. In talking about culture we are really talking about a process of reality construction that allows people to see and understand particular events, actions, objects, utterances, or situations in distinctive ways. These patterns of understanding also provide a basis for making one's own behavior sensible and meaningful" (p. 128).

Although there are many forms of communicative performances, Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) outline four important characteristics: 1) interactional dialogues that are social and not solitary, 2) contextual performances that are not individual acts but are imbedded in group activities, 3) performance episodes that have a beginning and end and can be clearly identified by the individuals, and 4) improvised performances where the individual can be flexible in playing out the event.

The sports information profession is, by definition, a service industry for the news media. SID's must perform their public relations duties in front of large crowds of people, more specifically to this study, for hundreds of local, state and national sports media at home football games. The sports information staff's performance during these annual fall rituals could provide valuable information to answer questions as to whether performance is more important than communication among the individuals in the participant group. Also of concern to the researcher is whether the SID's are performing during the participant observations, or are in fact being themselves so that accurate data can be collected.

The analysis of data from an ethnography of communication perspective is essential to identifying the communications culture of an organization. However, Littlejohn (1999) stated that recognizing that cultures are very different from one another makes generalization difficult. The sports information office at Southeastern State University, as was noted earlier, is a unique and distinct sporting sub-culture. The intent of this study is not to generalize the results in relate to other SID offices, but to discover solely the culture at Southeastern State University. But, without some attempt to analyze the findings, the study would be meaningless. Hymes (1974) presented nine ways comparative ethnography can compare cultures. They include: 1) ways of speaking, or patterns of communication familiar to the individual group members, 2) ideal of the fluent speaker, or what constitutes an exemplary communicator, 3) speech community, or the group itself and its boundaries, 4) speech situation, or when communication is appropriate within the group, 5) speech event, or what episodes are considered to be communication for the members of the group, 6) speech act, or a specific set of behaviors taken as an instance of communication within a speech event, 7) components of the speech act, or what the group considers to be the elements of a communicative act, 8) the rules of speaking in the community, or the guidelines and standards by which communicative behavior is judged, and 9) the functions of speech in the community, or what communication is believed to accomplish.

## Research Design

According to Dobbert (1982), the main purpose for ethnographic research is to discover and describe the culture of a people or an organization. The design of the study will be to utilize ethnographic methods to learn more about the patterns of communication in the office and what cultural symbols and icons they use to promote the SSU athletic program.

Dobbert (1982) recommended restating the research question in general terms and then again in cultural-pattern terms, for use as a checklist during the research study. Therefore, in the SID study, I will seek to discover first and foremost, what communications patterns are used among the SID staff, whether the relationships between the staff themselves and other members of different departments is consistent with previous research and whether the cultural symbols and icons reveals data about the culture of the overall program. Additionally, an examination of the interactions with other university departments by the SID staff will be conducted to validate or invalidate the statements of a culture of isolationism existing in the SSU athletics department.

Seven steps were suggested by Dobbert (1982) to help design the ethnographic research study. First, conduct background research to find out as much as possible about the culture. I conducted a pilot study in the fall of 2002 to familiarize myself with the SSU sports information office and the staff. The pilot allowed me to get to know the staff personally, establish a relationship of trust, and evaluate the working culture of the office. The pilot was a miniature version of the current ethnography, and it helped establish the research questions that frame the dissertation. During the pilot, I obtained a working understanding of the communicative culture in the SID office. I discovered whom the leaders are, how they talk with each other, what methods of communication they use, and how they operate with their subordinates. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state that 'gatekeepers' of information, or those who control key sources and avenues of opportunity, must be found. Sands (2002) notes that a key component of ethnography is getting the gatekeeper to become an informant, or one who provides information willingly without the locus of control performed by a gatekeeper. A

perfunctory look was given to the cultural symbols and icons (press releases, media guides, websites, programs, posters, and other material disseminated to the media and the public at that time). During the present study, a more long-term, comprehensive evaluation of the SID office will take place.

### Research Strategy

The intent of the study is to examine the Southeastern State sports information office from a macro perspective, observing all occurrences and incidents to consider all communicative patterns that may occur in the entire athletic department. The study's design will allow a wide-angle look at the interactions of the staff during normal working hours, at home football games (and other selected athletic events), at football operations meetings, athletic staff meetings and the weekly scheduled SID staff meeting. I will encourage the staff to invite me to any press conference, meeting, or event where they will interact with people not employed in the sports information office. The observation of the SID's in these settings should provide invaluable data to analyze about the culture of the SID office. This broad view is part of naturalistic inquiry, which Patton (2002) describes as studying real world situations as they unfold naturally. The researcher does not manipulate or control the collection of data or the subjects, but is merely open to whatever emerges from the observations and interviews. After collecting data at the macro level, a microcosmic review of the communicative patterns can be evaluated in perspective of the entire program. The Southeastern State University sports information office was selected for this dissertation for many reasons. SSU athletics, with the notable success of the Coach Akers-led football program, has become a standard bearer for the powerful major university with a national media reputation. The SSU football program will play on national or regional television in every game but one this season (the Tennessee contest September 27 will be carried on live pay-per-view). The program is symbolic of the so-called "football factory," which is akin to semi-professional football given the vast expenditures and income surrounding the program. The SSU football team has a multi-million dollar operating budget, and competes for the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) national

championship, with a payout of roughly \$13 million this season. However, the SSU program also mirrors the indiscretions of the professional National Football League with its acquired media reputation as a 'scandal' school. Several nationally publicized incidents all point to a critical media eye being zeroed in on SSU athletics. This media exposure has thrust the sports information office into the limelight as a sample of this type of institution.

Secondly, the relationships between the SID staff, athletic department staffers, university employees and the sports news media, in the experience of the researcher, are representative of similar major universities like those in the top 25 of the BCS rankings for 2003.

The research will follow the basic scheme for a sports ethnographic evaluation where the researcher is imbedded into the culture of the sports information office. Participant observation, followed by in-depth interviews to clarify data points, will be the primary methods of discovery in the dissertation. Since a comprehensive ethnographic study of a sports information office has never been conducted, the research will rely on methodology from other sports ethnographies like *From Red Ink to Roses* (Telander, 1994), *Friday Night Lights* (Bissinger, 1990), *A Civil War: Army vs. Navy* (Feinstein, 1996), *Hockey Night in Canada* (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993), and *A Season on the Brink* (Feinstein, 1986), to serve as a framework.

Bissinger spent a full season in football-crazed Odessa, Texas and his detailed description of the culture of a high school football team provided the researcher with guidance on how to approach the collection of data. Gruneau and Whitson chronicled the development of hockey in Canada and how the sport has implanted itself into the very fiber of nearly every Canadian citizen. Feinstein detailed a full season spent with the University of Indiana basketball program under the fiery Coach Bobby Knight. Each of these books describes proven methods for conducting participant observation, collecting data, and analyzing it to identify patterns by which to detail the development of a sports culture.

The research strategy will contain several assumptions, one of which is that the observed events in the SID office occur in the public domain and will be



organized and evaluated with respect to the three types of information included in Spradley's (1980) definition of culture. Inferences about the culture of the sports information office will be made based on how we observe human behavior, by listening to the oral speech messages, examining the written communications of the SID staff, and by sorting through the artifacts made by the SID office.

A second assumption is that the communicative tools used by the SSU sports information staff to interact with each other, with other athletic department staff members, and with external publics like other university departments, the news media, and fans, are normal tools used in the sports information profession. This can be verified through the personal work experience of the researcher. Devices like the personal computer, hard-line and cellular telephones, faxes, e-mails, websites, or walkie-talkies are representative of the items used to communicate during normal work hours and athletic events.

### Subject Selection

The Southeastern State University sports information office will be the subject of the dissertation study, and data will be collected on the interactions of the Assistant Athletic Director, his full-time and graduate assistants and student interns. Purposeful sampling, which derives its power from the logic of in-depth understanding, will be used to choose the information-rich cases for a detailed study of the communicative culture of the sports information office (Patton, 2002, Seidman, 1998).

Conversations by the researcher with various sports writers in the Southeast indicate that Southeastern State is indeed one of the best in the nation at executing "game day" for home football games. This designation is significant to the selection of the SID office as a sample, because it provides a contextual reference for the reader. Many football playing I-A schools try to emulate the major BCS eligible programs, but few succeed. It could be deduced that the sample is representative of the sports information office at an elite football institution. However, the culture of Southeastern State sports information is a unique illustration that cannot be replicated or reproduced at any other university. The cultural environment in SSU

athletics is similar to other prominent football schools, but it is not possible to generalize to other institutions because the study examines only the sports information office at Southeastern State University.

The primary focus of the data collection will relate to what is happening to individuals in a setting and how individuals are affected by the setting (Patton, 2002). By studying the SID office over a three-month period, a better understanding of the relationship between the SID and his subordinates should emerge. Also, the culture of communications that emerges through the use of various technology, interpersonal communication and symbols and icons, should reveal rich data for analysis. I will utilize typical case sampling primarily because the sports information sub-group is highly specialized. At the conclusion of the study, which is observing the culture and organization of the SID office, it will be helpful to present an in-depth analysis of the office. I highlight a common occurrence from my tenure as a sports information director to reinforce this sampling strategy. During my professional career as a SID, many people asked me what I did for a living. Because the SID profession is a complex job, which requires many different communication and sports skills, any individual outside intercollegiate athletics still had difficulty understanding the exact nature of the job even after a thorough description to the listener. The intent of the ethnographic analysis will be to present a clear picture of exactly what the sports information office is, who is involved, and how do they do their jobs. Therefore, the execution of this study would hope to enlighten the reader and more specifically, the client – the SID's themselves and perhaps the university's administrators and athletic department management -- as to what SID's actually do during normal, day-to-day operations.

The nature of this study is a pure qualitative effort that will employ a naturalistic inquiry. Patton (2002) stated in this type of research design, the researcher observes program activities, collects detailed descriptive data about staff-participant interactions and conversations, staff intervention efforts, and the reactions of the participants. The researcher then does in-depth interviews at the end of the study to learn how behaviors have changed, to receive explanations about observations the researcher has made and to see what their expectations are

for the future (Patton, 2002). The data collected are content analyzed to identify the patterns of experiences participants bring to the program, what patterns characterize their participation in the program, and what patterns of change are reported by and observed in the participants (Patton, 2002). This is precisely the type of research design and strategy that will be employed in this study.

Choosing a true random sample would not be appropriate in a phenomenological qualitative study (Seidman, 1998). Participants are selected specifically for inquiry based upon their immersion in the phenomenon being studied. The quality of the participant experience is the most important factor in the study, not the number of participants (Patton, 2002). A good informant is one who has the knowledge and experience the researcher requires, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed, and is willing to participate in the study (Morse, 1986).

The number of participants in a study can be determined when there is a saturation of information (Gay, 1996, Seidman, 1998). At this point, the researcher is able to determine they are receiving the same information. When the collection of data from the sample begins to produce only small amounts of new information in comparison to the amount of time required to acquire the information, data collection can be concluded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The researcher will obtain the subjects' permission to participate in the study prior to initiating the data collection process. The subjects will be sent a letter requesting the interview. Also to be included will be the list of pre-determined interview questions to be asked. The sports information directors of the participating university will also be contacted in advance to assist in arranging a specific date, time and place for the face-to-face interviews with the SID and their staff. Additionally, permission will be received to observe the SID and their staff informally in different work settings during the course of the study. The participants will understand the focus of study prior to the researcher collecting data.

### The Research Process

Entry into the field will occur in the fall of 2003, and the research will extend through the completion of the football season for Southeastern State. This three-month time period is related to a “focused ethnography” mentioned by Stewart (1998, p. 20), which concedes “the more targeted or limited the ethnography is to a particular and well-defined topic, the less time is needed for fieldwork “ (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 78). Following the start of the observations in early September, every effort will be made to solidify relationships and to earn the trust of those who work in the SID office. This mutual respect will allow for the collection of more detailed data regarding the interactions between the SID Staff, the cultural artifacts produced, and the speech patterns that evolve.

### The Ethnographic Record

The compilation of field notes, transcripts of audio-recorded interviews, reviews of press releases, media guides, promotional materials, website updates, daily e-mails, official documents, memorandum, and the use of symbolic material like the SSU logo, comprises the ethnographic record. This vast body of information is a thorough documentation of what occurred in the SSU sports information office during the study period. A complete description of how the ethnographic record was collected follows.

### Data Collection Techniques

The primary objective of data collection was to obtain and inventory communicative interactions inside the sports information office and other locations in the SSU athletic program. Data was collected through the use of participant observation, interviews of specific staff members and others who interact with them, reviews of artifacts (media guides, press releases, e-mails, website updates) produced by the staff. Perhaps the most effective technique will be “hanging around” outside of offices, dropping in periodically to find out what each staff member is working on, and initiating impromptu conversations about topic areas where questions have arisen. Specific attention will be given to the “high culture”

days of the fall – SSU home football games. The five home dates for the SSU football team will provide a rich environment to observe and evaluate the primary cultural festivals of this multi-million dollar sporting entity. The focus of data collection will always relate to Spradley's (1980) three areas of culture: staff behavior, artifacts, and staff communicative interactions.

### Participant Observation

During the ethnographic study of the sports information office, the researcher will engage in intensive participant observation, where the researcher enters the field to accomplish two things: 1) engage in activities appropriate to the setting, and 2) observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the chosen environment. The researcher must go into the field in a participative role, in the natural, "everyday" setting to be studied (Stewart, 1998, Fetterman, 1998). Spradley (1980) note that it is virtually impossible for a person to enter a situation and record *everything* they see. The complexity of everyday social life makes watching and recording all facets a daunting task that could result in what Spradley calls "overload." However, Spradley recommended the researcher not try to record every small detail, but be aware that because of "selective inattention" (a condition of tuning out, not seeing, and not hearing), we could miss details that could be vitally important while observing in the field (Spradley, 1980). We must acquire what Spradley calls "explicit awareness," or the ability to open our minds to new experiences and not discard small occurrences we might otherwise ignore because of our cultural conditioning.

While conducting the study in the sports information office, the researcher will be both an insider and an outsider. Spradley (1980) called this observing with a "wide angle lens." As has been noted in ethnographic research, the goal of the researcher is to "go native," where the subjects no longer notice the presence of the outsider, and begin to treat them like a part of the staff. Immersion in the culture is the goal of participant observation (Fetterman, 1998). Spradley (1980) said that the researcher, as an insider, would feel the same emotions, share the same experiences and become part of the culture. However, as an outsider who will

conduct the study and then depart at its terminus, perspective must be maintained to not get too deeply involved in the emotions and stresses involved in the high-pressure environment of the sports information office.

Spradley (1980) listed five types of participation with a fluctuating scale of involvement that the observer can engage in. Figure 1 shows the degrees. In this particular study, as with any ethnographic examination, it is difficult to state that the observer will be locked into one kind of participation in the study. Spradley (1980) mentioned the culture of the organization would sometimes dictate how much the observer will be allowed to be included. This is true with the SID office, as the subjects understand that the researcher is trained in their profession, but is still an outsider. As the study advances, the degree of involvement of the observer will increase. An advantage of a high degree of involvement by the researcher is that the observing stranger becomes a fellow, a neighbor, or a coworker (Dobbert, 1982).

Degree of Involvement	Type of Participation
High	Complete
	Active
	Moderate
Low	Passive
(No Involvement)	Nonparticipation

**Figure 6. Five Types of Participant Involvement**

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From "Participant Observation," by J. P. Spradley. 1980, p. 31. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Dobbert (1982) denoted four differences between participant observation and ordinary participation in a group. First, a participant observer organizes information based upon social science theory and methodology. Second, the participant observer is trained to record *in detail* many aspects of the situation being studied; the casual participant will take for granted the small nuances of the scenario or only recognize important occurrences in a goal-oriented fashion. Third, the participant observer periodically removes him or herself from the situation and reviews the data from a neutral position of a social scientist. Data is checked for completeness and the researcher seeks to generate questions from each component of the research. The casual observer would continue to participate in the situation without regard to analysis. Fourth, the participant observer constantly checks for evidence of personal bias or prejudice (Dobbert, 1982).

There are two major disadvantages of participant observation according to Dobbert (1982). The researcher may get too close to the data to see what the patterns are, and the participant observer is at the mercy of their data. Data is usually obtained at a slow pace and in a haphazard manner. For this reason, participant observation is most always supplemented by other fieldwork techniques, such as interviews, which will be conducted in this study.

### Interviews

The purpose of in-depth interviews is to understand the experience of the participants and to find the meaning of that experience (Seidman, 1998). It is not to get answers to questions, to test hypotheses, or to “evaluate” the findings. It is a purposeful conversation that is solicited by the researcher to attain information from the subjects (Bogden & Bilken, 1998). Interviews are used to gather data in the words of the subjects, and these words can allow the researcher to interpret a piece of the world being studied (Bogden & Bilken, 1998).

In interviewing research, the stories the participants tell are the central element worthy of collection. Seidman (1998) proffered that subjective understanding of the stories allows us to put their behavior in context and provide access to an understanding of their action.

Interviewing can exist as the predominate source of data collection, or can be combined with other forms of data collection (Gay, 1996). For this dissertation, interviews will as an enriching function to substantiate and validate the observations of the researcher. After observing a behavior or communicative interaction between staff members of with others outside the department, the researcher will conduct interviews with the Assistant Athletic Director, his four full-time assistants; the three graduate assistants and selected student interns to clarify what has occurred, and how they fit into the cultural scheme of the SSU athletic program.

### Interview Format

The dissertation seeks to discover how the communications culture of the SSU sports information office is affected by human behavior, the use of artifacts and interaction between staff members. A variety of interview methods will be used. A standardized open-ended interview process, which requires carefully and fully wording each question before the interview, will be combined with the advantages of the interview guide approach (Patton, 2002). The open-ended interview approach is to insure each participant gets asked the same question in the same way, in the same order. Respondents answer the same questions, thus increasing the comparability of responses; data is complete for each person on the topics addressed; interviewer bias is reduced and the facilitation of the organization and analysis of the data is streamlined (Fontana & Frey, 2000, Patton, 2002). However, the researcher should be allowed to ask follow-up questions that may reveal salient information vital to the study. This is consistent with the format of the interview guide approach, which encourages exploring side topics that may reveal information that may not result from the formal interview. The flexibility to vary from the more format, rigid structured questions is a strong point of qualitative research.

### Structured Interviews

To correlate the findings of the observation of the sports information staff, structured interviews will be conducted with each member to clarify and obtain accurate data regarding the patterns recorded by the researcher. In structured



interviews, the researcher controls the pace of the interview and the interviewer reviews responses in regards to coding patterns established before the interview is conducted (Fontana & Frey, 2000). However, in the structured interview process, errors in respondent behavior, errors in the nature of the task (including methodological errors), and errors by the interviewer can occur (Fontana & Frey, 2000). In addition, structured interviews look to find consistent responses to the set questions and do not take into account the emotional connection the participant may have to the subject matter (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This is the rationalization for the combined method where the unstructured interview procedures can be inserted into the more formal process.

When a comparison of the benefits and detriments of both procedures is conducted, it is clear there is justification for a combined interview method. Structured interviews provide a more exact method, based upon the pre-established questions, to consistently gather information from participants. This lends itself to more accurate data analysis. However, the risk of missing rich data, which could provide an explanation of more complex behaviors through follow-up questions such as in an unstructured format, cannot be dismissed (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Most interviews begin with cordial small talk based on elements of common interest (Bogden & Bilken, 1998). This allows the researcher to build a relationship with the subjects, make them more at ease, which will make the interview process more enjoyable for both (Bogden & Bilken, 1998, Patton, 2002). The atmosphere of the interview should be a relaxed and friendly in nature (Gay, 1996). Researchers need to make efforts to gain trust and establish rapport with their respondents (Fontana & Frey, 2000). By establishing this atmosphere, the interviewee is more comfortable and will respond more freely to the questions. Additionally, good interviews generate rich data that can be used to reveal the perspective of the respondent (Bogden & Bilken, 1998). "Early in the interview you try to inform the subject of your purpose and make assurances" (Bogden & Bilken, 1998, p. 94). It is crucial to assure the respondents of the confidentiality involved in this study; this should be done in a supportive and reassuring manner (Bogden & Bilken, 1996).

### Unstructured Interviews

Throughout the course of the three-month ethnographic study, impromptu interviews will be conducted to receive immediate feedback on observances not understood by the researcher. This form of interview will assist in providing more accurate and reliable data for the study. An advantage of unstructured interviews is that the method allows for more flexibility during face-to-face contact with subjects (Fontana & Frey, 2000). When topics are generated from the format interview questions, a skilled interviewer should be prepared to address those issues and not be bound to the rigidity of the structured interview format. If a researcher has general issues or topic areas to discuss, unstructured interviewing allows them to explore these topic areas.

Fontana and Frey (2000) noted an unstructured interview is a friendly type of conversation. During this interchange, the mood should remain friendly, but there is the possibility of wandering away from the primary topic areas. The researcher should attempt to remain focused on the subject matter and establish a relaxed tone that encourages interactive conversation (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). When moving to an unstructured format, the researcher should begin the interview in a casual manner, asking general questions at first. Once a cordial, trusting relationship has been established the researcher can move to more serious, penetrating issues. The researcher should work to avoid leading their subject off track or getting too involved in conversational discourse, which can allow for a loss of focus from the study or prompting response (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

### Interview Schedule

The researcher will prepare an interview schedule, or a set of pre-formulated questions with which to answer the research questions proposed by the study (Seidman, 1998). Additionally, the schedule will be developed to confirm the findings recorded by the researcher during participant observations. The schedule will be created based upon preliminary analysis of the field notes collected through participant observation in the SSU press box and at athletic events. It will seek to reconstruct the experiences of the SID staff and explore their meaning. As has been

discussed, the structured interview questions will be asked of each participant in the study and this will provide consistent data for analysis (See Appendix A). However, the mixed method of using a formal interview structure combined with the open-ended questions will allow for a conversational interchange that should generate rich data.

Seidman (1998) cautioned the interviewer not to insist the participant answer on the specific questions in the formal structure. Rather, the questions should be used as a guide to stimulate their interests which will encourage them to be responsive to the interviewer and provide much more detailed information. The interviewer must be prepared for the possibility that the interviewee may not be as interested in the topic area (Seidman, 1998). Should the interview take this direction, the interviewer must use great skill to guide the session in the direction that will reveal a greater amount of rich data.

#### Review of Artifacts and Rituals

A culture of paper exists in the sports information office at Southeastern State University. That is, a wide array of printed documents (releases, media guides, game notes, statistics, layout sheets, photographs) are scattered throughout the offices of the SID staff. Taking into account that each of the 17 intercollegiate sports at SSU has a four-color media guide with a minimum of 48 pages inside (football is 364 pages long), and each program has a staff member generating addition public relations efforts, the volume of paper is tremendous. Additionally, this paper culture is magnified at home football games. The SID staff provides game day releases, press notes, flip cards, media guides, and a machine gun distribution of every kind of statistic available during the game to an assemblage of over 300 media personnel.

Many of the SSU 'paper' artifacts will be collected and analyzed by the researcher to establish how valuable they are as communications tools. Also, the traditions and rituals practiced by the SID staff during the study, along with the wide array of artifacts they produced will be reviewed and analyzed to see how they influence the culture of the SSU sports information office.

## Data Analysis

A massive volume of information will be collected during the course of the study. The goal of the initial phase of data analysis will be to organize, catalogue and code the voluminous amount of raw field notes, interview transcriptions, SSU artifacts and other observational data. The objective of the first phase will be to narrow the information down into sub-categories to begin preliminary analysis and identification of emergent patterns of communication and cultural themes.

Stewart (1998) noted four dimensions of coding that must be taken into account in an ethnographic study. First, the logical relationship between code categories must be standardized. That is, the categories should be mutually exclusive where an actor in the study can only be placed into one category. Second, data is transparent and reappears in cycle after cycle of review, and should be coded appropriately each time it is read. Third, the rules of ethnographic coding must be more flexible and willingly “bent” to accommodate the fluctuation in the data. Rigid rules cannot be applied due to the fluid nature of ethnographic study. Finally, coding should not be limited to a factual, or “code” basis alone; Stewart used the term “index” to refer to a factual placement of a referent item in the data to mean it is a factual statement, rather than one that could be interpreted as ambiguous. Data should be coded so that a term does not function only as a limiting “code,” but also is open to interpretation as an index for a sub-category of thematic explanation.

Data manipulation through efficient, consistent and disciplined use of ethnographic procedures and current computer based software is the next phase of data analysis. I plan to use the NUD\*IST qualitative research software to help code and index the raw field notes and interview transcriptions into a workable format for analysis. Stewart (1998) calls this process decontextualizing and then recontextualizing the data. Decontextualizing occurs when a computer search is done on your ethnographic record and the software recombines the data according to shared index words to form a pattern of meaning. This process allows for the selection of “core themes” that emerge from the computer analysis (Stewart, 1998). Following that procedure, recontextualizing can occur where the researcher can advance empirical inquiry and theorizing by refocusing the data on an “inclusive”

theme that has been crafted and selected as vital to the study (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 159).

To assure the objectivity and reliability of the study, good faith on the part of the researcher must be assumed (Stewart, 1998). When data manipulation begins, the self-discipline of the researcher to accurately code the data into accurate themes and patterns must occur.

### Trustworthiness through Triangulation

A major concern of non-qualitative research is the reliability or validity, that is, the quality control of a study. The accuracy of the study is assessed by traditional questions like: Can the study be replicated in another study? Are the questions used, therefore the data, valid? Does the research measure what it says it is going to?

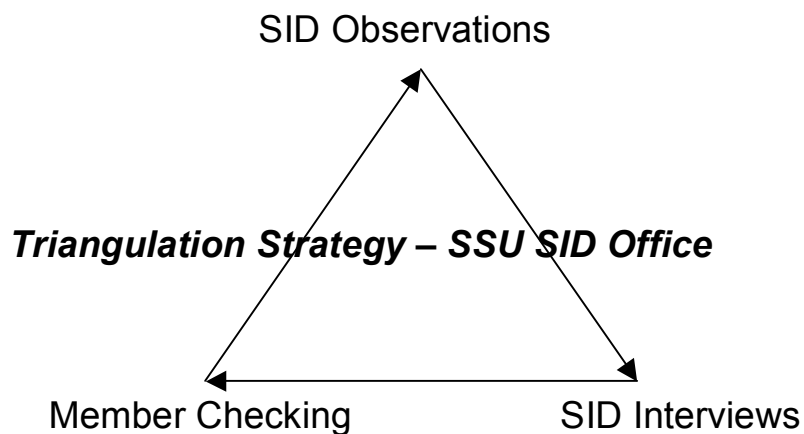
Qualitative researchers Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer a different set of criteria that they noted should be used for assessment an ethnographic methodology. They stated the study should demonstrate its “trustworthiness,” and be linked to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is built by intensive contact in the field, data collected from multiple sources, and by triangulation. Lincoln and Guba firmly stated external validity or transferability as defined in the quantitative research tradition is not appropriate in a qualitative study. The ethnographic study, which provides a highly descriptive form of data, will allow others who wish to replicate the study the chance to do so.

Triangulation is a common strategy used by qualitative researchers and it will be employed in this study to affirm the credibility of the data analysis. Patton (2002, p. 93) noted triangulation adds to the accuracy and credibility of the findings through criteria such as “truth value” and plausibility of findings, credibility, impartiality, and independence of judgment; confirmability, consistency, and dependability of data; and explainable inconsistencies. Data triangulation will be used in this dissertation to affirm the credibility of the findings. Following data collection, the raw field notes will be provided to the SSU sports information staff for review. After an agreed upon

period of time, the researcher will discuss the findings with the staff as to the accuracy of the statements.

Patton (2002) provided several methods of triangulation. The method I will employ for this study is the data triangulation method as identified by Denzin (1978). This method utilizes a variety of data sources to “illuminate an inquiry question” (Patton, 2002 p. 248). Triangulation methods that are limited to only one method are more vulnerable to error according to Patton. In a pure qualitative, naturalistic analysis strategy, the triangulation methods are to collect the raw qualitative data and use the content analysis approach to certify the rich data.

I will further triangulate my data by presenting the transcribed interview notes to the Southeastern State SID and the four full-time staff members interviewed (see Figure 2). They will have the opportunity to review the data to verify the accuracy and legitimacy of the interviews and observations. This member checking procedure provides a necessary credibility check to validate the accuracy of the findings of the qualitative study.



**Figure 7. Triangulation of Data**

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Adapted from “Conceptual Issues in Qualitative Inquiry,” by M. Q. Patton, 2002. p. 66. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

### Control of Bias

A major concern in this dissertation is the potential for bias on the part of the researcher. After 22 years as a college sports information director, it must be

presumed the researcher has extensive knowledge of the policies and procedures of operation in a SID office. A working knowledge of the terminology, job descriptions, interactions between superiors and subordinates and the use of technology and other tools of the trade must also be assumed. The researcher will attempt to become an uninvolved observer. However, the aforementioned background of the researcher will prevent him from being completely objective, so the potential for bias is noteworthy. This potential does not preclude the possibility that a quality ethnographic research product can be produced. Patton (2002) noted that many social scientists recommend a detachment on the part of the researcher to prevent this type of bias. He counters that argument by stating that such detachment, presumed to reduce bias, will in fact portray the researcher as distant, cool, or removed from interest in the subjects. This perception could prevent the collection of worthwhile data. Going into the field ("going native"), or doing direct participant observation in the sports information environment will involve some risk of bias, but without becoming directly involved in the lives of the participants and the interactions between them, quality ethnography cannot be produced. Stewart (1998) recommended two questions be asked to determine the potential for bias: 1) Has the research and the data been specified sufficiently so the reader can make their own informed judgment about the interpretation and findings?; and, 2) Can the study be replicated?

Lofland and Lofland (1995) stated ethnography is affected, to a greater or lesser extent, by the personal characteristics and orientations of both the researcher and the insider informants. It is clear the study will be affected by the interpersonal relationships and daily interactions between the researcher and the subjects. How well the bias of both of these is minimized will dictate how much credibility the study will have in the final review.

### Ethical Concerns

The nature of ethnographic research produces major questions regarding the ethical conduct of the study. A close relationship between the researcher and subjects is essential to collecting accurate and worthwhile information, so a bond of

trust must exist during the entire study period. Dobbert (1982) mentioned three areas that must exist for the study to maintain ethical validity: confidentiality, honesty and responsibility.

With confidentiality, the researcher will inform the participants prior to the study through the use of an informed consent form (approved by the SSU Human Subjects Committee, see Appendix B), that they will be observed doing their jobs interacting and communicating. The researcher will present the transcripts of all field notes and audio recordings to the staff member to which the information pertains. All of the data will be kept confidential from other SID staff members. All the information disclosed must be kept strictly confidential and not revealed or shared with anyone outside the study, and that nothing be published that could injure the subjects professionally. Honesty in the study requires that the researcher tell the subjects in advance what will be done; what benefits will be derived by the participant group; who will have access to the research reports; and what possible risks there are for the informants.

The responsibility that is born by the researcher is to insure that the lives of the participants are not affected by the study, that their privacy is not interrupted and that their normal work schedule is not disrupted. Part of the dissertation study will include interviewing the sports information staff to confirm and get clarification on portions of the data collected. This is naturally disruptive to the staff, but the willingness of the SSU sports information staff to participate in this study has been determined in advance and the potential for some disruption has been explained. Another concern that must be explained in advance to the SSU staff is that sensitive information on SSU student-athletes, coaches, staff members or SID staff members themselves, will not be released or reviewed by anyone but the researcher. All SID staff members will receive a copy of an informed consent form prior to the commencement of the study, and the researcher as required by Southeastern State University will keep a signed copy. During the course of the study, the researcher will be part of sensitive athletic meetings, football game operations meeting, and discussions with staffers about media, athletes or others in the SSU sports world, and everything documented from these observations must be held in strict



confidentiality. During the pilot study, a small observation occurred that an inexperienced researcher might have missed. When I was identified as being a former SID who is now a Ph.D. student observing their office, the SSU SID allowed me to introduce myself to the staff, rather than him introducing me. That small, inconsequential item gave me more validity in the eyes of the SID staff, added credibility and respect to my presence, and helped create an echelon of invisibility in which to conduct my observations.

## CHAPTER 4

### OFFICE SPACE

When I departed from a 22-year career in college sports information, my last thought was that I would never return to the insanity of that business. Never. The relentless hours in gymnasiums, late nights at basketball, baseball, or soccer games, the whining of tunnel-visioned coaches, the blithering intolerance of shortsighted athletic directors, never-ending bus trips, and writing yet another press release, media guide or game note, had taken its toll. “Congratulations,” I told myself, “you’ve escaped the inane world of intercollegiate athletics.”

Note to self: ‘Never say never.’

The initial stimulus for this study came shortly after commencing my work toward the doctoral degree. Two highly prominent sports information directors at Division I universities had been terminated at their respective institutions. These hall of fame CoSIDA members were highly respected not only by their peers, but also by the media. Finding the answers behind these high profile dismissals launched me back into the sports information office. It also provided the intellectual catalyst for the scholarly study of this vital, and under appreciated function of the intercollegiate athletic program.

After struggling as all doctoral students do with the inevitable question of “selecting a topic,” the lure of the sports information world drew me back. It was as if a Star Trekian tractor beam had locked on to my vacuous student persona and slowly, reluctantly reeled me back in. Yes, I was back in the realm of the SID. The world of long hours, creative passion, and of genuine love for athletes and coaches, initiated by dedicated individuals who love this crazy business and the inherent pressures of being in an environment of extremely difficult, praiseless work. Thus, I

re-entered the sports information office at my target university to initiate this study. The best part – I get to go home at the end of the day.

### Purpose of the Study

As previously mentioned, the purpose of the study is to discover the culture of communication in the sports information office at a Division I football-playing institution. The opportunity to conduct a longitudinal participant observational study inside this culture is rare and will be beneficial to the sports public relations profession as a whole. The accumulation of observational data enriched by interviews with the subjects should shed new light onto the misunderstood practitioners of intercollegiate sports information.

Studying culture, or the desire to observe and record the behavior patterns, beliefs and traditions of a group, is the underlying framework of the dissertation. Spradley (1980) defines culture as the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior. When ethnographers study other cultures, they must deal with three fundamental aspects of the human experience: What people do, what people know, and the things people make and use. Collectively, when these are shared, they become *cultural behavior, cultural knowledge, and cultural artifacts*. Applying these three foundational premises to the sports information office, my primary goal in this study is to ‘crack the code’ of the culture of sports communication at Southeastern State University.

### Establishing a Relationship

I initially made contact with the SID office at Southeastern State to conduct a pilot study in preparation for the dissertation study. During the pilot, I used a model that was identical to the one used for this study; that is, in-depth participant observation followed by interviews with the subjects. The number of subject contacts during the pilot was not nearly as extensive as in this study, and only four follow-up interviews were taped.

The researcher’s goal in an ethnographic study should be to “go native” and earn the complete trust of the subjects. While conducting an ethnography, the

researcher should maintain a polite distance from the subjects, yet cultivate rapport, identification and trust so as not to run the risk of acquiring “complete membership” (Adler & Adler, 1987). The opportunity to conduct a pilot study presented the chance to get acquainted with the SSU sports information staff, and test the research methodology. The pilot study, combined with repeated exposure to the staff at various athletic events, generated the beginnings of a solid trust between the subjects and me. The SID staff came to understand that I was “one of them” based upon my previous background as an SID.

### Participant Demographics

The Southeastern State University sports information office will be the subject of the dissertation study, and data will be collected on the communicative interactions of the SID, and his full-time and graduate assistants. Purposeful sampling, which derives its power from the logic of in-depth understanding, will be used to choose the information-rich cases for a detailed study of the communicative culture of the sports information office (Patton, 2002, Seidman, 1998).

The sports information director, George Cashman, is a Caucasian American male in his late 40's, who has been in the SID business dating back to the 1980's. He has personally witnessed the dramatic change in communication patterns of the sports information business first-hand. “I remember when I first started, we used telecopiers that took six minutes to send one page to a newspaper. We eventually moved to FAX machines, and we still use the FAX a lot, but it's fading fast.” He admits he is “not a computer guy,” but is slowly adapting to the rapid technological changes evolving in the industry. Cashman arrived at SSU as a student intern, and then moved into a job as graduate assistant. He then left SSU to take a full-time job, but returned three years later as an assistant. He assumed the head SID role four years later.

SSU has four full-time assistant SID's, a full-time secretary, and three graduate assistants. The four-full timers include Marie, who worked at several Midwestern schools before moving to SSU. One of the surprise findings of the study was that Marie had been appointed as associate SID two years ago, and was given

responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the office. This was surprising because it was not disseminated in the media, and was not widely promoted in the SID office. George never mentioned it during the pilot, and only during an interview with another staff member did this fact manifest itself. Other assistants include Jack, who took a position with SSU four years ago, transferring over from a rival conference school; Stan, the staff's computer expert, who has been full-time for three years and earned his master's degree at SSU; and Arnie, the youngest of the group (and the only married member of the staff besides George). Arnie is the only member of the staff who was groomed at SSU as a student. He took a GA's position after graduation, and was able to take a full-time position a year and half into working toward his master's degree. He is six hours shy of completing the degree. Betsy, the office's secretary, has been with the SSU SID office eight years and is the catalyst that binds the group together. She is effective in blending the needs of the group's superior, George, with that of the full time staff and the GA's.

The GA's are a diverse group that blends youth, experience and ambition. Lisa, a young Black woman, is in her first year and is full of enthusiasm and creativity; Troy is a former full-time SID who took a position at SSU to obtain a master's degree; and finally, John transferred to SSU as an undergraduate and worked his way up through the ranks to become an assistant. He is not a student, but is technically employed at the same level as the GA's.

### Physical Environment

One of the dominant factors that influenced the communicative culture in the SSU sports information office was the staff's physical workspace. Prior to the groundbreaking for the new athletic building at SSU, the SID staff was located in one area of the old building where everyone was directly adjacent to each other in connecting cubicles. The department secretary was located in a central reception area and the others were on each side of a long hallway. This environment, which I observed during the pilot study, stimulated direct contact between all members of the group on a daily basis.

When construction began on the new building, the staff was moved to the football press box of the Howard Hufnagle Memorial Stadium. One of the first observations I conducted was of the staff's new office space in Hufnagle Stadium. I noted this as a potential problem for the SID staff for two reasons: 1) The upheaval from their normal (comfortable) workspace, and 2) the incredible length of real physical space among the offices of the three constituent groups of the SID staff. The burdensome effort of having to move an entire office is a headache in its own right, but to move to a space such as the press box was not conducive to staff cohesiveness, or communication, based upon the actual distance between the group's offices. This will be discussed in detail in following paragraphs.

Reaching the temporary SID office in the press box was very confusing due to its location on the extreme south side of the stadium. Upon arriving at the stadium, I noticed an information sign in the lobby. On a sheet of paper was hand written the words "SSU sports information office on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor." The temporary nature of this sign indicated to me that the location of the office is only for the duration of time it takes to complete the construction of the new athletic center. After getting off the elevator on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor, the "in flux" state of the SID office is immediately apparent. There was no clear sign leading me to the office. The only sign on the door was one that said, "Media must be credentialed to enter the press box." These signs were leftovers from the previous weekend's football game. Having been in football press boxes before, I recognized the significance of the sign.

Since there was not a sign or arrows directing me to the SID office, I plowed ahead through the double glass doors and headed down a long hallway with gray carpet. Press boxes are notably bland with long white desks and blue chairs. Walking down the hallway, I noticed several different doors on the right side. They noted, "Home broadcast booth," "visiting broadcast booth," "TV booth" and "PA booth." These are all used to provide space for broadcasters during football games.

The SID office is an interloper in this press box. The physical layout of their office space indicates a transient, temporary nature -- one of little comfort and permanency. There was an open door to the left and it led to the kitchen/storage area of the press box, which had been converted into offices for the GA's and

student interns. This space was quite cluttered with boxes of old media guides stacked high, reams of copy paper, old game programs and various other artifacts of the SID office. This space also contained the office's FAX machine, copy machines and three computers in the two cubicles for the GA's and student workers.

After leaving the GA's workspace, I continued walking north on the long hallway. To the right, you could see the windows of the press box and the impressive view of the football field below. In an open area located at the midway intersection of the press box, were four cubicles for the four full-time assistant SID's. These cubicles (6' X 8' at best) were very cramped, offered little comfort and were in my opinion, a highly inefficient workspace. SID offices, based upon my personal experience, are always cluttered with many job tools – items like media guides, folders, programs, photos, CD's, and other things necessary to perform the communication tasks of a sports information director. There were boxes of media guides on the floor of every assistant's office, old press releases, posters of various athletic teams, videotapes, notebooks, laptop computers, and other office equipment. The full-timers must endure cramped conditions in their offices, and there is NO space for visitors to sit. Marie stacks work materials on the two chairs in her office; you literally cannot get into her office. Lighting in these cubicles was dim as the fluorescent lights were located at the top of the press box ceiling, which was at least 20 feet high, and were not directly overhead. I clearly noticed the lighting was atrocious. Stan had a small clip-on reading light in his office, and all of the full timers utilized extra lamps due to subdued lighting conditions. Ventilation in this area was adequate and the temperature was comfortable.

One amazing fact I noticed immediately was that John, the pseudo GA, actually sits out in the public area. His desk consists of two 2 X 4' tables, and he uses a laptop computer and a telephone in this miniscule space. He must put away all his materials for home football games.

The most significant space issue I noticed was the vast distance between the different offices. The SSU press box is considered one of the finest in the nation, and it is capable of hosting a large media contingent of over 500 for the top games. However, as an office space, it presents a challenge to the staff because they are

separated from each other by over 300 feet. The open space in the center of the press box is used as a place to feed the media on game days. Located in this area were five long tables, covered with media guides, slides, photos, file folders of various printed materials and two laptops. Because of the itinerant nature of the office, the staff was forced to use this space because of the cramped conditions and the dearth of storage space. It must be noted that all the materials spread on the tables must be put away each day because of security reasons.

I should clarify that the space issue affected the culture of communication in this SID office. Future research on the staff in their new headquarters will verify if the observations done during this study are truly relevant to the culture of the SID office.

The office of SID George Cashman is impressive at first glance. My first visit was a brief glance around (mostly out the window with the incredible view). I also noticed the workers down on the football field re-painting the SSU logos for the upcoming home game. Cashman's desk is quite large and had orderly piles of material spread on it. Behind his desk was a large wooden hutch for books and media guides. Also behind the desk were two three-drawer file cabinets with files of SID material. Behind the desk on top of a small file cabinet was a family photo and a laser printer. On the walls were cabinets filled with media guides and other printed materials. On top of one of the cabinets were various video cameras, VCR's and other related equipment. Also on top of the cabinets were several file storage boxes. On the counter underneath the wall cabinets was a long counter with a sink, and at the end was a television tuned to ESPN. Cashman had the remote on his desk alongside a walkie-talkie. There was also a VCR on top of the TV. Cashman also had a drink cup on the right side of the desk and had various papers stacked up. In a testimony to the transient nature of his office, there were several different types of chairs in the office. There were also 2 high stools and 2 padded media seats set along the long table facing toward the field where the announcers sit during games. There were 2 rows of press tables in Cashman's office – one near the window and the other at the top on the same level as Cashman's desk. Ironically, every chair in there was blue in color (SSU's school color). I noticed the



fact that the scoreboard controller for the whole stadium was located on a wall behind Cashman's desk. Later observations during home football game day showed that this office was the control center for the statistics crew, the clock operator, press box announcer, and quote takers during the game.

During the duration of the study, I noticed George's office went from organized to messy to cluttered, to toxic waste zone. I walked into George's office one day and he was cleaning out several drawers. "I haven't done this in a year and you accumulate so much stuff," he said. "One day last year, Mr. Jones said he was coming up to see me, and my desk was a 'mess.' I took everything off the desk and put it in the drawer, and haven't looked at it since." I noticed he was tossing out almost everything very quickly. It easily filled a large trashcan. He happily mentioned that he did find a \$150 hotel bill that he hadn't been reimbursed for. "That was a good thing to find."

The final office area is that of Betsy, the long-time secretary for the SID staff. She is located in a separate office right next to Cashman's space. As was noted earlier, her office is the nerve center for the sports information staff. One of her major complaints though is that in this office configuration, there are two entrances to the press box – one on her end and the other at the far end of the stadium. This becomes vital to the study of the culture of communication in the SID office because Betsy rarely knows who is actually in the office because she is 50-75 yards away from most of the staff members. She also reported that the SID's infrequently tell her when they arrive in the office, or when they are leaving. When she received phone calls for them, she had to respond with an unpopular and highly uncharacteristic answer, "I don't know where they are."

A component of this study related to the space problems and how it affects the communication among the staff members, is the fact their personal offices are used to host hundreds of media personnel five times a year during home football games. The only staff members who do not have the media crawling over their desks during home games are the four full time assistants. The others, including Cashman, must pack up everything and be prepared to have food eaten, cokes being spilled, peanut hulls or brownies consumed right next to the photos of his wife

and children. Cashman walked into his office at halftime of one game, and there were 25 people in the office, including two sitting on his desk with cokes and food at the ready. He joked, "Make yourself at home ...is there a keg in here for this party?" He definitely showed a bit of frustration, but he handled this complete invasion of his privacy very well. Jack put it this way:

The way the office is set up now, I wish there were six cubicles right together, and I wish George had one and Betsy had one. It's tough to say space is an issue, because we have lots of space up here. The space we're allotted isn't conducive for how we need to work. We need to be in each other's business. If Stan is sitting there and he's thinking, "I need someone to work softball, any of us would ask what can we do; how do you need help?"

Office space became a defining factor that established the foundation of the culture of communication in the SID office. The physical distance between George's office, the full-time assistants and the graduate assistants on the other end of the press box, in my opinion, created a culture of separation. Not only did the real space between the offices generate separateness, it also fostered real communications breakdowns. George, the head SID, had an office on the far north side of the press box. The full-time assistants were tucked into small cubicles in the middle, while the graduate assistants were stuck in the kitchen on the complete opposite side of the box from George. As we will see in future chapters, this physical separation leads to more communications problems in the SID culture.

## CHAPTER 5

### VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Jack ventured into George's office on Friday before the first home football game of the year. The phones were ringing steadily, a constant swarm of media and other innocuous people were wafting through the press box. The atmosphere was thick with the tension and excitement of 'almost game day.' Jack, knowing George was up to his ass in alligators and could use some help, poked his head in the door and said, "Need anything?" Cashman asked Jack to assemble a crew to move several boxes of old media guides out of the television broadcast booth. "There are 29 large boxes of old baseball guides in there," George said matter-of-factly, "Let's get them moved to another storage area."

Thirty minutes later, in the area outside Jack's office, George asked Jack if the guides had been moved. After receiving a negative response, George asked Jack again to move the guides. Jack, rather than moving on the guide project, immediately took the opportunity to ask Cashman about a basketball media issue. George assumed the guides would be moved.

Fifteen minutes later, Jack reappeared in George's office and asked, "What do you need?" George immediately responded, "What we need (pause), is to get those media guides moved."

This anecdote is but one example of the fractious, rapid-fire methods of communication typical in the culture of the SID office. During my observations, several clear verbal communication themes became evident:

- Over the Wall Communication
- Drive by Meetings
- Frequent use of Humor

- A Relaxed, Informal Tone of Voice
- Mixed Communication Signals in Staff Meetings
- Diminished Use of the Telephone
- Language of the Superior-Subordinate Relationship
- Tensions and Conflicts

### First Signs of Communication Trouble

I must mention a communications issue that became one of the foundational findings of the study at the beginning of this section. I observed a repeated pattern of slow responses to phone calls, requests or other demands placed on the SID staff. This observation by virtue of its repetition in the observations and confirmed in the interviews, provides a significant finding in defining the office's communication culture. It will be dealt with in more detail in this chapter.

This doctoral study came within a few days of being cancelled due to what I found to be the major communication problem in the SSU SID culture - not returning phone calls and following up on requests. I began discussions with George in early August about his office being the subject of my ethnographic study. He was very positive about the idea, and said he had to get the approval of the director of athletics. I waited two weeks, and then began to wonder if the idea had been vanquished, or whether it still had some merit left. After numerous phone calls went unreturned, a host of emails not responded to, and three drop-bys to George's office were unsuccessful, and with a looming deadline approaching to launch some sort of study, naturally I was getting nervous. I considered aborting the idea, but after three and one half weeks, George finally emailed me back indicating the proper approvals had been granted. Imagine my relief!

However, as I was soon to discover during the observational phase of the study, this became much more commonplace with not only George, but also the entire staff. Several staff members mentioned this as being one of George's weaknesses. Betsy put it bluntly:

It's incredible how bad he is about getting back to people. I have people who call and say, "No I'm not leaving a message because I know he won't call me

back.” I get that all the time. I get a lot of him saying, “I can’t talk to them right now,” when I know it’s because he hasn’t done something he was supposed to do for them. I’m not sure why this happens. He’s a big procrastinator. I am too, to a point, but he is major. He’ll tell people (and this is part of our frustrations – the rest of the staff), he will tell somebody he told one of us to do something, and we haven’t done it ... when that’s not true. He never told one of us to do it, and he just dropped the ball and he won’t take responsibility for it.

Lisa said:

Arnie gets frustrated because George will say, “I’ll take care of something,” and then it doesn’t happen, and he then questions Arnie about it. Then, he gets the angry customer afterwards when people are looking for the thing George was supposed to take care of.

Troy confirmed Lisa’s statement:

Jack wanted me to go to the conference men’s basketball tournament. He wants me to go, but I don’t know if I can go. I asked George last week, and I still haven’t heard back from him, and they leave in two days. The same thing happened when they played at Pittsburgh. I’m from north of the city, and I would like to have gone on the charter. I was informed at 6:30 the day before that I’d get to go. All I needed to know was yes or no.

George’s delays in getting back to the staff sometimes has to do with his job tasks. With Mr. Jones and Coach Akers, he’s got a lot to do, but a lot of times he just doesn’t get back to us. It’s very frustrating. He waits to the last minute a lot. Sometimes we just don’t know what’s going on. There is not a lot of follow through in this office.

Throughout the course of the study, I observed that George repeatedly put off getting back to people, whether it be returning phone calls promptly, answering questions or responding to requests from staff members or the media. I can conclude that George’s workload, which includes duties as an athletic administrator, the director of the sports information office, and his reluctance to relinquish his sport duties in football, are part of the contributing causes of this problem. However,

based on my own experience, I would also state that the daily fluctuation in requests and demands from the office's publics, places extra strain on their ability to maintain a consistent level of responsiveness. The study shows this to be a significant part of the SID office's culture.

### Over the Wall Communications

The most preferred method the SID staff used to communicate with each other was yelling over the wall. As an outside observer trying to maintain an objective point of view, this appeared extremely odd. This was highly popular with the full time assistants because of the close proximity of their offices (the back-to-back location of the low, portable walls). Rather than get up and walk five feet, each staff member would repeatedly holler over the wall of the cubicle to the next person. The actual verbiage of the conversations ranged through many topic areas like, "have you finished that release," "do you have that photo," "what time is the coach coming by," "are you going to the press conference," "or is that layout done yet?" I wasn't as interested in the actual words, but rather the method of delivery. The over the wall style was consistently used by the SID's during the entire duration of the study.

The graduate assistants in the kitchen area also used this communication method as a small portable wall separated them. They were unable to see each other in a direct line of sight. Additionally, George Cashman and Betsy, his secretary, employed this unorthodox style for quick requests for needed information.

Since verbal communications is one of the primary modes of interpersonal communication in the sports information office, this finding became a central finding from the observations. I was intrigued by the fact the SID's did not spend more time with face-to-face communication. The staff interviews revealed why this practice is a major part of the culture of the SID office.

Stan said:

Proximity more than anything defines why we communicate over the wall.

We've all been together for several years and we're comfortable with each

other. Because of the time constraints and the number of ways you're pulled, you talk when you can when you have the time and you're all sitting there. Being in the "zone" (focused on completing a task) was another crucial reason Jack cited 'over the wall' as a primary communication method:

When I get in the "zone" don't bother me. But also when I'm in the zone, and Stan asks me a question, I don't have to get up and move; I'll answer it. It's easier for us to yell over the wall rather than get up and walk into someone else's office. With the hours we put in together, if we can't be like that, then we've got problems.

I enjoy the verbal dialogue we have up here. I didn't think when I first came here that I would, but I enjoy the way we are set up, because I can get the prevailing answer ... is locker room two words or one, or is classroom two words or one? The great thing about those four cubicles there is that we're not embarrassed about anything. I can yell over to Stan and ask him what he thinks of this or that.

Arnie mentioned:

We mostly just yell out over the top of the wall. Everything's over the wall. It's come to be normal. When I first got here we had separate offices, and then we had cubicles. That's when we started communicating that way. This over the wall thing is mostly because of our space issues.

Marie said:

Talk over the wall ... it's been like that since I've been here. The four full time assistants can talk over the wall, so we stay in contact. I think we communicate over the wall the way we do because of our personalities. I don't know if that's right or wrong, but that's the way we are. I've never really stopped to think about what it looks like to somebody from the outside. It's normal for us to yell over the wall. We've always done that. This is our primary method of verbally communicating. Stan made mention of a problem with over the wall communication:

We sometimes get a little free complaining to each other, we're yelling over the top, and it could be a little problem if George's there. He gets really mad

over stuff that's really not that big a deal. Stuff that's important to us, he doesn't think much of.

George also added a similar warning inherent in this unorthodox style:

Sometimes the staff won't realize someone's standing outside their office. It could be a student or even Mr. Jones. There was a time when we had major league problems with the football team and we had leaks in the office. I didn't think it was my people, but I was afraid it was a student. One thing you've got to be careful of is Marie talking to Arnie over the wall and two students are there and they go out for beers and it gets around all over everywhere.

Graduate assistant Troy put a supermarket spin on this communication style:

The over the wall's they do down there are convenient. We just talk over the top. It's right there. It's easier to do that, rather than get up and walk over there and maybe forget the question. A lot of this depends on the boss and the culture of the office. If the boss is o.k. with it, then it's o.k.

The SID office's marked pattern of communicating over the wall, or around the corner, became a cornerstone of the culture of the Southeastern State office. Having done this exact thing at several different SID jobs during my own career, I would state that this is a normal part of SID culture. The pressure to perform in a hurry, and respond to multiple tasks and demands at the same time, puts the SID's in a situation where they must choose communication methods to get things done in a hurry. The over the wall method worked well in this environment because of the ability to get answers to questions quickly without having to spend extra time getting up, walking into their neighbor's office, sitting down, and then formally asking the question. It simply speeds up the communications process. Betsy mentioned the office is like a newspaper newsroom:

It's kind of like a newsroom that you see on TV. It's what we look like. We yell at each other on the way to do something else because we're always in a hurry. It's a combination of things why they do that.

I mentioned in chapter four how the office space arrangement created a culture of separation. That holds true with respect to the three specific areas of the office – 1) George and Betsy, 2) the full-time assistants, and 3) the graduate



assistants – which are physically separated and hierarchically divided. But, the observations did not confirm a similar finding with regard to the communication in each particular area. All three office areas used the ‘over the wall’ method to get quick information. Most importantly, I believe this was used to maintain a bond of interconnectedness to each other. So, it can be concluded that each office space had its own unique culture of connectedness through the use of the ‘over the wall’ device.

### Drive By Meetings

Another component of the verbal communication culture in the SID office is the use of ‘drive by meetings.’ I have judiciously lifted this term from the popular cultural phrase referring to violent shootings, but fortunately these drive bys have a much different purpose and effect. As was mentioned in the staff’s comments about over the wall communications, the hurried pace of the SID office and the vast job load and deadline oriented job description is the primary reason for drive bys. Several of the staff mentioned that the SID office is not, and never could be, a normal business setting. They even stated that it is not even similar to any other office within their own athletic department. George noted:

The biggest thing I want is for people from the outside or from other athletic department offices to get what they need, and they get the feeling we’re having fun. I feel like so many places you call at SSU, or within the athletic department, whether it’s the business office or the ticket office ... it’s all so cut and dried.

He went on to discuss his reasoning why ‘drive bys’ are so prevalent in the SSU sports information office:

By the nature of having to cover so many different elements, you have to have these constant bump-into meetings. I like for my people to work very independently. I want to think I’m not checking up on them, but I am checking up on them ... just through my questions. But I would hate for them to feel like I have to get this done because George’s waiting on it. But, most of the

time, I'm happy. So that's just sort of my style, and I grabbed that from the guy that taught me.

I want my staff to feel like my engaging them frequently will make them feel like they're cared for and their sport is cared for. People do wonder what's going on with them personally.

The full-time staff had a similar response to 'drive bys':

Jack ... You can walk over to Stan's office and say, "What do you think of this, or how would you do this" ... and he'd be the same. I think that's very healthy and important for us doing a better job.

One-on-one meetings happen every minute of the day. You can walk into George's office anytime you want to. He doesn't close his door; he's not standoffish. He hasn't built a wall around himself. I went into his office the other day and said George, let me do all the offensive football bios. We had a good discussion, because Arnie and Michael are busy. Give them to me. I hope he does. I enjoy writing bios.

Stan added:

George's physical presence in the office doesn't bother me. I only think it would bother you if you're goofing around all the time. When he sticks his head in your office and you're playing a video game for five minutes, he doesn't make a big deal of it because he knows you're here 12 hours a day and you're spending a lot of time.

Arnie said:

It (drive-bys) is good, but a lot of times it's distracting. It's good to say hello, but sometimes you're working on something and George comes in and says, "Hey, what's going on?" You almost have to do the walking around here.

There are some days when I won't even walk by George's office.

Lisa noted that on her end of the press box, the other staff only stopped by to talk when they needed the FAX machine, or to talk to John Blakely:

Until Blakely moved down here, they didn't come down this way that much. They would only ask about the copier and the FAX machine. "Well, you sit right next to it." I would say, "you sit right next to the wall – are you its

keeper?” I know George walks down the hall to talk to people a lot because I think he gets lonely. Point blank. Marie pokes her head in quickly to ask questions. When we are in the new building I think a lot of this will stop.

I would summarize that ‘drive bys’ are similar to the ‘over the wall’ discussions because they maximize the interconnectedness between the individual groups during the day. The full-timers and the GA’s favor this method. It allows them to maintain a human element in the daily communications among themselves. My observations also showed that the ‘drive bys’ are also used as time saving devices by the staff, again owing to the rapid nature of the need to get questions answered in a hurry so they can move on to the next job task. Once again, the office space issue and the physical distance between the office areas, contributes to this communications phenomenon.

My observations of George offered a different cultural element. A culture of surveillance could be part of his reasoning for using the drive by practice. As stated earlier, George said, “I want them to think I’m not checking up on them, but I am checking up on them.” He presents the scenario of the casual, relaxed office environment, yet he clearly states that he walks by to see what the staff is up to. The staff people clearly revealed in the interviews that they do see George’s ‘management by walking around’ style as intrusive and distracting, and the avoidance of him shows that his surveillance style is part of the culture of communications.

### Humor

A fascinating discovery during the participant observations of the SSU sports information office was the repeated use of humor from top to bottom of the office hierarchy. Humorous situations most often appeared during the weekly staff meetings when George and Tina would vie to see who could be the funniest. Frequent jokes and laughing happened during over the wall and drive-by sessions, and the GA’s and students in the back frequently displayed a little bit younger version of the humor.

George was the first to admit that he uses humor to break the tension in the office and keep the atmosphere as comfortable as possible:

Our office is kind of noted for in the department for having a sense of humor. I say this to Vince Jones; I have always believed you have to have a way to get into an athletic department ... whether you're Joe Public or the media. It has to be fun to deal with. The biggest thing I want is that somebody from the outside can get what they need and have fun, or feel like they're having fun. There are so many places you call at SSU, or within the athletic department, whether it's the business office or the ticket office, it's all so cut and dry. If you can hit the sports information office and we're pleasant and people seem to be enjoying themselves, I'm happy. If you're walking Lee Corso down to an interview, and he gets the feeling you're walking him to the gallows, it's a problem. I want my people telling them something funny ...I want this program to be perceived as having personality.

To show just how hard George tries to maintain this humorous air in the office, I cite these specific examples:

- George breaking out into a country song when a discussion of problems with the music at home football games came up at a staff meeting.
- George kidding a writer on the telephone during a teleconference, asking him if he'd like to sing one of his famous show tunes for the group. And then, erupting into his own version of 'Tiny Bubbles.'
- Surprising the SID staff with small jokes and kidding at nearly every meeting I attended.

Some of the situations where humor occurred included where staff members poked fun at each other. Jack said:

We can hear what Arnie says, and we laugh at him. He laughs at himself. And I can laugh at myself. We have to do that. We have to be friends. If one of us didn't fit, it would be difficult to communicate up here. Even if George and Betsy were right next to us, I still think the kidding around would go on. I think George would get involved in it. I don't think the kidding gets vicious, or

personal. There's not any name calling. There's none of the you're an idiot because you didn't do this or that.

John Blakely added this opinion on humor in the office:

I think the use of humor relates to the type of personality we have. We're all laid back, but we're serious about what we want to get done. We all like to cut up, and we're all fairly young. You can see how certain people handle some situations, they can take the humor and it's back and forth, and it's never done intentionally to harm somebody. It's all done in fun.

It's nothing serious. When you work with people for so many hours together (sometimes seven days a week), you've got to get along, and if you can't have fun cutting up on the side, it would be really hard.

Arnie smiled as he said SID's are a 'little bit off':

You have to have a bit of a sense of humor to work in sports information. You have to be a little off. You have to make up for all the hours you work and for all the stuff you deal with; you have to have a sense of humor. Very rarely is humor used negatively. Everybody knows where the line is.

Stan put it more succinctly, mentioning the use of humor as a 'stress buster':

Humor is sometimes used to get a point across that you don't want to say straight out. We're around each other so much, that we'll get the tension, so sometimes humor is used that way –a stress buster – but you have a lot of 13, 14-hour days. You'd go crazy if you didn't use something to relieve that. We definitely do some things to make it more fun.

You have to remember that George is a big fan of laughing and humor too, so it sets a lot of the tone. He likes to tell jokes and make people laugh and that filters down to the rest of us.

Marie also noted how humor relieved the stress of long hours:

I think it's used a lot because none of us are very serious. You're with each other a lot ... more than your family and friends. If you can't use humor, it would be awful. It's to relieve tension and make us realize this is sports and not something else. I think it's the culture of sports information.

Humor does provide a bonding element for us. Even if we were in another department within the athletic program, I don't know we'd be this close because ... not that there's anything wrong with that, but we're all different, and we wouldn't bond together in another environment

Lisa put a different twist on it as she mentioned that the staff sometimes uses humor to subtly 'make fun' of their supervisor:

Humor is used to make fun of George. He has no clue about computers or any of that crap. During the meeting over the cell phone flap, we all just laughed when he said, "Don't use your cell phones." Marie asked the question, "What if a writer is calling you about getting so and so on the phone, what do you do?"

Betsy also mentioned the staff uses George as the brunt of the office jokes on occasion because of his self-admitted lack of computer knowledge. She also acknowledged his hilarious sense of humor:

The staff displays a load of humor. I've worked in offices before where it was not your joke-telling atmosphere. This office uses humor to keep blowing off stress ... from letting it get to you. One way they do it is making light of situations or making fun of the boss, which I think all offices do. Each person in here probably has more sense of humor than any group of people I've been around. Everyone's sense of humor is so different, but I really think they use it to relieve stress. If you don't laugh it off it's going to drive you crazy.

George has the craziest sense of humor. You never know what to expect from him. Sometimes he'll run by my office and do some kind of pirouette, and then go back to his office and go back to work. He's more your comical practical joke, joke telling kind of guy, whereas the other ones aren't really like that. They make wise cracks, where he's just an absolute clown. When he does that it breaks the monotony, it breaks the ... he's just crazy.

Humor is a major component of the culture of communication in the SID office. As noted by almost the entire staff, it is used as a stress relief device, whether through the use of jokes, making fun of each other, or simply allowing themselves to vent their frustrations through sarcastic remarks done in a humorous

way. I used this device myself during my days as a sports information director for exactly that reason. On occasion (and only Jack would admit to this), you tell jokes to yourself. As a former SID, I know ... I used to joke to myself if no one else was around. Humor allows the office to maintain a sense of relaxation despite the enormous pressures to perform.

The other use of humor that was revealed in the observations and interviews was as an anti-hierarchy device. Despite George's efforts to maintain a level of connection between himself and the staff, the simple fact that the staff makes fun of him, or utilizes them as the brunt of their jokes (about his lagging computer skills), shows they have some disdain for him as superior.

#### Relaxed, Informal Tone of Voice

Having worked in several SID offices in the past, I was always intrigued by the casual, informal nature that seemed almost a presupposed "given" in the sports information culture. The months of observation in the SID office confirmed this hypothesis. The staff described the atmosphere as relaxed, and highly informal, yet was businesslike in the sense that a lot of work was being accomplished. Communications in this office environment were mostly casual, and yet subdued. This is mostly contextual due to the rushed nature of communication within the office.

Troy pointed out the businesslike nature of the office, but made it clear that the intensity of the atmosphere was not a constant:

I'd say most conversations in the office are work oriented ... more serious. In the staff meeting, we try to knock things out, and then we kind of get off track. Once everyone's said his or her piece then it gets kind of crazy.

Arnie mentioned a similar idea:

I don't think the tone of this office changes very much. Very rarely does anyone raise their voice. No one is real timid and no one speaks softly. I think it's very relaxed in this office. When the tone is raised, something's going on.

Betsy also confirmed the back and forth, up and down nature of the office:

A lot of times the tone is very dry and very loud at times. It's loud but not in a bad way. It's usually yelling as you're running by or sticking your head in, or over somebody else because there are 10 other conversations going on. I think its business-like, but there's always a personal level going on.

John said:

We communicate in a business tone, but it depends on the situation. If somebody is on tight deadline or has a game tomorrow, they're a lot more serious. There's still the fun, but you know they have to buckle down. You learn when somebody is working hard, because they say hey, give me five minutes and I'll help you out.

George summed up the informal nature of his office:

The atmosphere in our office is a bit of gamble on my part. The tone in our office is conversational; casual, easy. I want there to be no reluctance to say anything, including cracking on one another. At times, I'm pretty frank about stuff, and some of them have more of an edge than others ... like Marie will say more. But I don't want there to be any agendas in our office when we talk to each other. I just want it to be the truth.

There is a danger in having like I have it. I'm sure I'm perceived in other places in the building that my office is I don't have control of my people. But that's tough. That's the way I'm going to manage this group. If I was the ticket manager, I wouldn't manage the same way. It's geared toward what we have to produce. And these people have to be creative.

The Southeastern SID office clearly is an informal business climate, where the tone of voice is relaxed, yet subdued. During my observations, I witnessed numerous examples of discussions and impromptu meetings that were carried on in the hallway, in each other's offices, or at staff meetings, where the tone was informal. Yet, I always maintained a gnawing wonder whether this casualness was genuine. Laughter was present, but it was clearly not a constant. George's mention of 'there being a danger in having it like that' may be a reminder that the danger is real for him and the interpersonal relationship with his staff.



### Mixed Communication Signals in Staff Meetings

The only scheduled group gathering for the SID staff is the weekly staff meeting. I derived a great collection of field notes in these meetings, which I believe revealed a large proportion of the culture of communication in the SID office. As I mentioned in the previous section on the tone of the office, the atmosphere inside these meetings, was very casual, yet George ran them quickly and efficiently. George sat at his desk during the meeting while the staff members sat in chairs in the crowded office. George's office doubles as the public address announcer's booth during football games, so the transient nature of the office space was readily apparent. George was dressed in a starched blue shirt and SSU tie and wore a blue blazer. He did not stand during the meeting; or refer to a written agenda, but rather worked from memory in reviewing the various items for discussion with the staff.

The SID staff at SSU for most meetings included six males and two females, all attired in casual dress, or SSU polo shirts. This varied based upon travel responsibilities for certain members assigned to fall sports. Each is in their late 20's – early 30's with the exception of one graduate student who is 23 years old. The atmosphere of the meeting was very relaxed, yet businesslike. George moved through the agenda points quickly, and the staff was very attentive to his direction. This point is key to my research, because from my own experience, these meetings can be somewhat charged when some staff members are behind deadline, have not achieved tasks that were expected and if other team-related problems have caused undue stress on the staffer. George kept his tone of voice low and calm and because of a meeting with the ABC television staff 30 minutes after the start of this meeting, he moved directly to the business of the meeting.

He utilized humorous sayings and jokes to engage the staff. He followed a written agenda, and the staff was attentive at the beginning. The observations showed that the staff paid attention for a short time, but toward the end, nearly every meeting turned into a wide-open freelance forum with different conversations taking place simultaneously. Rarely did the staff arrive on time, including George, who calls himself a meeting goer, not a meeting conductor. One football home game

week, George mentioned that he had been in three meetings prior to the 11:00 a.m. SID staff meeting. "I've been in three meetings already today – four if you count my wife – and this is the last one."

A significant observation I noticed was that the staff all sat in exactly the same seats all season. Either through self-selection or coincidence, it was arranged hierarchically. Marie, the SID responsible for the office's day-to-day operations, sat in front next to George's desk, as did Arnie, who is responsible for football, SSU's most important sport. The rest of the staff fanned out in a second row behind those two, with the GA's striving to get as far away from George as possible. The anti-hierarchy theme manifested itself in the staff meetings.

George mentioned to me that his goal is to include the staff in all the phases of the operation of the office, to keep it relaxed and try to assure they have a little fun while doing their jobs. He routinely thanked the staff during the meetings, asked for their opinions, and made sure they each had the opportunity to discuss their sports during the meeting. SSU, like most SID offices, assigns a particular sport(s) to each staff member based upon their experience or longevity with the university. So, a hierarchy of sports does exist here.

George maintains that he wants the staff to feel like they are all part of one work unit:

I want them to feel like they are connected ... many of them are laboring on things that don't give them any satisfaction. Marie's been working with a basketball program that hasn't given her any emotional reward. She's not getting anything from it. Part of my engaging them frequently is that feel like they're cared for and their sport is cared about. People do wonder what's going on with them personally.

You can be laboring on golf stats for a bad golf team and it's a real grind. That's why I ask how the golf team's playing. I really don't give a rat's ass, but it gives the person a chance to say, hey, they're playing at the Woodlands, and at least they know they are engaged with me.

He listened to each staff member's report, asked for opinions on matters like where to put ESPN Game Day or when the Alabama media day was held last year, but he

always gave short, brief answers to questions and kept the meeting moving. No one on staff elaborated much. Their comments were brief. In my notes, I wondered if this particular communication pattern was in response to George's busy schedule ("let's get it over with so I can get back to work," or was it just his method of conducting a meeting)?

George managed to maintain a casual environment during the meetings, but it was pretty clear when he was upset, or wanted to make a point:

"Troy, when I say I want the press box ready to play three hours before the game, I want it ready. We need someone to open the windows and not have to reach over people." [I noticed for the first football game this was done about 1 1/2 hours before game time and loads of media were already seated]. Humor was a constant. Arnie put George's record of having worked 130 consecutive football games in the SSU football program one week – good for 50th place on the CoSIDA all-time list. George jokingly read it to the staff [primarily because he distains much contact with CoSIDA]. George broke into singing My Old Kentucky Home when the mention of pre-game music problems came up ... He was making fun of what the old fans in the stadium would prefer rather than the modern pop music the players selected.

George's philosophy on staff meetings is to get the people in, present all the relevant issues they need to know, let each person give a short report, and then open the discussion up. At the end of the meetings, side discussions would begin in an almost flippant, joking manner. I noted that meetings degenerated at this point and very little relevant group communication got done.

Three findings that help define the communications culture of the SID office came from the staff meetings. First, there was a curious lack of conflict during all the staff meetings I attended during the course of the study. At first I thought the Hawthorne Effect (where people do not act normally when strangers are present), caused this. Later in the study when I was accepted as nearly native by the culture, there still was no evidence of conflict. However, every staff member mentioned there was conflict, particularly Marie, who was unabashed in her lack of hesitation in taking issues to George. So, I would conclude that a culture of avoidance is in place

in the office. Despite George's attempts to keep an open mind and an open door, the staff for the most part avoided any conflict with their superior. It is clear that Marie has taken on the role as the spokesperson for the entire staff on matters of disagreement. But, this action between George and Marie was only conducted behind closed doors, unobserved by me. Second, the anti-hierarchy seating arrangement engaged in by the staff was revealing. Those on the higher strata of the organizational hierarchy in the office sat near George's desk, while those on the opposite end, chose seats farther away. Third, the consistency with which the meetings degenerated into wide-open free for alls at the end was noteworthy. This confirmed the sporadic, disjointed nature of the communication culture in the office, and is directly related to the over the wall and drive by modes already identified.

#### Diminished Use of the Telephone, Upswing with the Cell Phone

Logic and my own personal experience tell you that the use of the telephone is an expected mode of communication in an SID office. Surprisingly, the observations of the staff performing their jobs did not bear this out. In fact, the observations and subsequent interviews revealed a split in the preference between the use of the phone and electronic technology (to be discussed in chapter six).

Jack, a self-reported 'old school' SID, was one of the strongest supporters of using the telephone for sports public relations work:

I was taught to pick up the phone and talk to somebody. If that keeps me here an extra few hours a day, then so be it. Sometimes other SID's will call me and say I didn't think you'd be there. Then why are you calling me for then? I use the phone to make friends with the media. I put them on the phone any time they want to talk to Ben Bird. I'm on the back of the bus going to the airport, and Ben was cool with it.

If Brad Daugherty and Vince O'Brien are broadcasting our game, as soon as I find out, I'm calling them. I'll tell them, can I get you on the phone with Wally Smith? With a basketball game on TV, I need to do whatever I can to make it a two-hour infomercial on Southeastern State basketball. If it's them remembering that I called them, I'll do whatever it takes.

It's crap that we're using electronic communication so much. Getting the information in a timely manner is the most important thing. Talking to them is vital. It's not a little component ... it is the component. What are we going to do ... change numbers? Picking up the phone is the most important thing we should do.

Troy, the other GA, supported the concept of personal contact while dealing with the media, but in a different manner from Jack:

I'm more of a face-to-face person. I hate talking on the phone. I can get a better read on people if I talk to them.

Marie also admitted to preferring the phone, but admitted to using it less and less, even to the point of avoiding answering it after working hours:

I use the phone the most. I'm starting to use email more, but I don't like it as much. I feel like email is good when you can't make calls at night because you can spend an hour returning emails, but I still think the phone is more effective. I still like that personal communication.

After 5:00 p.m., rarely do I answer the main phone. I only answer it if something big's going on. I used to answer it all the time, but you wouldn't believe some of the things people ask.

Lisa, the youngest of the staff, presented an opposing view which does support evidence that Generations X and Y are using electronic means rather than telecommunications:

There's rarely, rarely a day when I talk to another's school's SID. Usually it's kind of through email.

Betsy supported a nudge toward the staff using the phone more:

Sometimes when you're answering the phone and everybody else knows the game time and it's not on our website, and they haven't told me, and I'm the one getting all these phone calls, I get pissed. O.K., I'm the one fronting the phones. Why didn't someone tell me?

When I first started working here, there was no web site. The majority of my day was taking phone calls from the outside on players, games, times, scores, everything. Now, that's the least thing I do. People who call now are

older generation people who don't have computers. It's funny because they'll say, "Don't tell me to go to the website ... I don't have a computer. I don't use those things."

George acknowledges the advances in electronic technology, but says there is no substitute for the telephone in sports PR:

I am upset that our culture has gone to that, but there are advantages. By the same token, there is no substitution to talking on the phone or in person.

That's why I'm out talking to booster groups, travel with teams when I can. I don't think that PR people are out there anymore.

I get kidded all the time by some of the national writers who say I don't call them back in time. I try to, but you know how it is, I'm swamped. It's a message to me that when I (the media) call, you'd better call me back. A lot of times this (gesturing toward the computer) is more important than that (phone). Sometimes I've got five phone messages to return and I put them aside to work on the computer. That's not right. It should be the other way around. I'll catch myself during the year, going wait a minute, those phone calls are much more important.

A major flap erupted in the office over the use of cellular telephones during the late fall. During one SID staff meeting, following a busy month of the assistants using their cell phones to call writers to arrange interviews, George, in response to edicts from senior athletic management, essentially told the staff not to use their cell phones anymore. I found out during the interviews that George is the only SSU staff member with a department issued cell phone. I was floored when Marie mentioned that to me while discussing the cell phone issue. This incident clearly indicates the increased value of the cellular phone to the SID's to help expedite the business of PR and promoting the university. However, by contrast, the mandate to use their own phones for university business was laughable. Both Marie and Jack mentioned rolling up several hundred-dollar bills during major media opportunities. Yet, George persisted on maintaining the party line on cell phone usage.

Jack particularly was peeved by this policy:

Not being able to use our cell phones is a bunch of shit for us. The day the Vlade Tkuska thing came out, I had a bill of \$278, in one day. I was in New Mexico with my Mom. And I'm not going to make those calls? We should be given phones. There's no question. We should be given phones. (I asked Jack whose phone he uses). Mine ... FB: You don't have a Southeastern State phone? Jack: "No!" FB: You're joking!? None of us have a phone. We have to use our own phones and we usually can't turn it in. We have to use our own cell phones to do university business. We can't turn it in.

Marie supported Jack stating:

We had a big discussion on cell phone bills, and I've never turned one in because I don't have time to go through it. But I'm the one fighting with George about it and I've never turned one in.

Betsy mentioned the value of cell phones in keeping track of the fast track schedule kept by the staff:

The assistants are going in 50 different directions. It's difficult for them to keep me up to date on what they're doing, but cell phones are wonderful (laughs). Cell phones are wonderful.

George confirmed how much the cell phone is actually used in SID work today:

The cell phones are huge now. We're on call 24 hours a day. My wife made the observation that (she's a nurse practitioner) and she's on call every fifth weekend. She said you're on every weekend. And that's true ... particularly with a cell phone. You can't get away. You can't dodge people. It helps you a lot, but it's a burden.

I communicate differently on a cell phone than a regular phone. I can't stand physically to talk on them because of the interruptions and static. It drives me crazy when somebody calls me on the cell phone when I'm sitting right here.

The only other usage of the telephone noticed in the study was George's use of his intercom to collect the staff for meetings or to ask a specific question from time to time. He mentioned:

I bet I've used the intercom maybe 10 times this semester. The AD uses it all

the time.

Nowhere in the study is there stronger evidence to support a paradigmatic shift in the culture of sports information than in my discovery of the telephone versus the personal computer as the primary communications device at SSU. The 'old school' pitted against 'new school' SID's debate clearly fell along the lines of the veteran SID's who were trained to use the telephone first to communicate, with the younger staff members who were raised in a computer first generation. The culture of electronic communication in the SID office will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter.

I will admit to some bias on this issue being an 'old school' SID myself, and I firmly adhere to the belief that personal contact is preferable to a sterile, digitized email. I admit electronic communication is effective, but the overuse in the SSU office has clearly cost them some ground in maintaining good interpersonal relationships with each other.

#### Language of the Superior-Subordinate Relationship

The relaxed management style George professes to utilize in running the SID office is one that he admits is predicated by the culture of the job responsibilities:

My style would be different if I thought they were well paid and didn't have too much work. I would probably be more rigid and a lot more demanding than I am. I'm not that way, because these people are going way above. I don't want to be the hard guy. Their job responsibility beats them down. I don't want their job to do it.

When Betsy came on as our secretary, after about 6 months she told me she had never seen a boss who could laugh with the people and scold them too.

It's a tough deal, but I hope it's like that. You have to have personal relationships with the people because you spend a lot of time together. At times, I'm pretty frank about stuff, and some of them have more of an edge than others ... like Marie will say more. But I don't want there to be any agendas in our office when we talk to each other. I just want it to be the truth.



I would hate for them not respect me enough to be a little bit intimidated. The thing is, I've been there. I was right there. I was a GA. Those staff members who have been in the business long enough are feeling what I felt. To their disadvantage, I know exactly where they're coming from.

I'm not a yellor screamer at all. I do get dissatisfied with some things, and we do have some major screw-ups that warrant being yelled at, but that's where I hope that communication line is open enough so that when I'm mad at them, they know it and they react to that. A lot of times I'll get onto somebody and ... I've jumped them before, like in the staff meeting ... I'll ask somebody something and I'll give them a look, or I'll come back at them.. Or I'll pause, and it's kind of uncomfortable for them.

George defines his management style as being very relaxed and open, but we will see how his communication style has led to a culture of separateness, which has birthed an anti-hierarchical system inside the office.

Jack sees George as a wide-open superior who will always listen to his concerns:

You can walk into George's office anytime you want to. He doesn't close his door; he's not standoffish. He hasn't built a wall around himself. I went into his office the other day and said George, let me do all the offensive football bios. We had a good discussion, because Arnie and Michael are busy.

Betsy was moderately critical of George's ability to manage his staff through his communication style:

When he does communicate, he seems to take jabs at people, but it pisses them off and shuts them down. He's critical of people but not in a constructive way. Just a little smart-mouthed little comment under his breath or he'll mumble and then leave the area. His comments will be to the person but not to their face. He'll have his head down when they are right next to him.

## Communication Tensions and Conflicts

Admittedly, George does not like conflict with other individuals in the office. This finding could be the most vital piece that defines the culture of communication in the SSU sports information office. George noted emphatically that he avoids conflict at all costs. He would prefer to let something fester and see if the person can solve the problem themselves before he has to take action. This lack of desire to make tough personnel decisions (and communicate his decisions directly) was well documented in the interviews and was repeatedly mentioned as the primary cause of unrest and conflict in the office.

George's perspective offers one side of the issue of managing a diverse, highly creative staff, that by nature of the job, must work independently and make individual decisions without benefit of a direct supervisor much of the time:

I do not like confrontation. I don't like it at all. To an unhealthy degree, I don't like it. I've learned to deal with it better. But, I'm one of those who lets the pot brew on the stove as long as it can before I have to grab it. I'm not good at nipping stuff when it starts. I don't like to hold someone's hand on a project. I want somebody to work through their problems before it comes to me. I'm better at dealing with conflict by writing a letter. I've written one recently. I'm much more likely to write a letter to somebody and then call them. It's because I want them to know what I'm talking about ahead of time. One thing I can't stand is getting sideswiped. I hate calling someone to say come down here when you get a minute; I need to talk to you. I hate that. I usually say, we've got a problem with the women's basketball team; can you come down here and help me deal with it. Or, I've had some complaints about something and I want to talk to you about it. I don't like hitting somebody off guard like that, so I'll write them a letter. I think better and communicate better in writing, and then ask to meet with them. My guys are about 50-50 on that. They usually realize it's a positive thing. I think it's a better idea to give somebody an idea of what conversations are

about. There are other people who might see that as a weakness. I just don't enjoy the confrontation.

Marie, who jokingly blamed her Latin heritage on her ability to be confrontational with other people, pointed out that she and George have had their share of "knock down drag outs." She is the self-appointed champion for the entire staff who takes the problems and issues to George:

I feel good about my relationship with George. I don't hold back. My relationship with him is different from the others. They think I can get away with murder ... because I'm a girl. And because I'm a strong girl who doesn't back down. I don't see it that way. I think I've got a good working relationship with him. I'm not afraid to go to him, and he's not afraid to come to me either. Oh yes, there is conflict. We've had some knock down and drag outs. We do have a different philosophy of running the office. If I get upset over somebody else not doing their job, I'll bring it up to him and he won't agree, and then I'll get bitchy. What I've tried to learn is if something doesn't affect me, even though I see it, I shouldn't get myself upset over it. But ultimately it does affect me.

Patty Vitino told me a few years ago, just because they don't do it the way you do it doesn't mean it's not right. I have to remember that, and I've tried to. I am also able to draw the line between friend and boss. I think George respects my opinion; he does hear me.

I'm not afraid to raise my voice. If there's something I believe in, I don't mind arguing with George. I've got a big mouth, and if it's something I believe in ... I even argue with my mom if I believe in something.

On the big discussion on cell phone bills, I'm the only one fighting with George about it. I'm fighting for them, and after the meeting they're like, "thanks," but they don't say anything.

George relates to Marie like this:

Sometimes she comes in here and it's like, "Ah, here we go again." At least you know where she's coming from. She'll work her ass off, and if she's frustrated, there's a reason. With her, you listen to what she has to say, and

then wait a few days and later, she's ok. You just let it simmer out emotionally.

Betsy, who must communicate with George on a daily basis, reflects her thoughts on the reasons for the tensions in the office:

I don't think he communicates well with the rest of them. Not that I don't think he doesn't try; I think he tries, but on a personal level, he does not like conflict. Not at all. He will do pretty much anything to avoid conflict. And so that turns around into a big lack of communication. When you try to avoid conflict, you're avoiding people.

He especially does not like conflict with women. I've noticed that. Marie pushes him. She knows that's the only way to get him to communicate. Marie pushes him to make decisions, which I think is good for him even though they bump heads a lot.

I don't like conflict either and I just keep my mouth shut, but when you're in a managerial position ... you have to make decisions. He wants everybody to be happy and to be relaxed. You can't be that way when you're the boss. There are definitely tensions here. It all goes back to lack of communication on George's part. I've been in this office eight years, and I've seen all of them going at each other. The majority of tensions that arise in the office mostly start with him. It's because the people on the staff don't know what's going on.

Stan added support to the argument that most staff tensions arise from the communication issue with George:

George needs to be more of an office manager and he wants to be a football SID. That's where a lot of the problems start. There are certain things he needs to handle with respect to sports, especially football. There are certain things that should fall to him, but he shouldn't be a day-to-day football guy. You have to decide if you want to stay working with the kids, or stay with a sport, or start managing an office.

Arnie also confirmed the tension that has arisen because of George's attempt to try remain involved with the day-to-day operations of football, rather than concentrating

on managing the office:

The main thing we can do better is to have a plan of attack. Sometimes you feel that you need to be doing something, and you're worried you might be overstepping your bounds ... especially for me. Sometimes George will set up interviews with the coaches and sometimes I do it. Other times I assume he's doing it, but sometimes there's a lapse.

We need a person for football only. George has too much going on. He needs to do all the other things, and direct the office and let go of football. George needs to take care of Mr. Jones and Coach Akers, and at other big schools, that's what they do. George doesn't want to let go because he's done it so long. I'd rather have none or all.

George mentioned to me in the interview process that he is pleased there is some separation between himself and the staff because it indicates he hasn't gotten too close to them personally. However, he has stated that his desire is for the culture of the SID to remain relaxed despite the pressure, stress and tensions. One finding of the study was that there was a line of demarcation between the staff members who have been there for a while and those who are relatively new. He pointed to the hiring of one staff member was an 'experiment,' a gamble that has given George a loyal employee who looks upon him as the "boss."

One of them I really hired through clinched teeth. The situation we were in with conference basketball was that we needed somebody to get us good publicity for our program ... someone who knew the big time college people like Dick Vitale. We needed somebody with a little credibility. Jack brought that. His shortcomings really grind on my hot spots. We're working through them, so it's been interesting.

Jack counters this by calling George the boss without hesitation:

I understand that he's the boss. This is his office. It ultimately comes down to the fact it flows down hill from Vince Hart to George. He's the boss and ultimately it's his responsibility. In my release, he says you will put the opposing starting lineups in the game notes. I don't personally feel I need to

publicize the other team. He said, no, you're doing it. There are not very many things he's going to ask me to do, but when he does, I do it.

George approaches the staff members who have a longer tenure in a different manner:

It's different with Stan because he came in as a graduate assistant, and didn't know how things were done. To be successful with me, you have to have some self-motivation. Marie's great at that. I'm not good at taking people through things step by step. She's very good at that. I'm aware enough to know that if she ever left, I'd have to get a details person. Arnie's not good at that either. I just want to tell them to get the media guide out in this time, use this designer; this is how many pages you've got, and this is how much money you've got to spend ... go. I don't want to say do the outlook section by week two. Even if I had time, I'm still not good at it. Marie is remarkable. She has patience, she lays things out for people how to get things done, and that just drives me crazy.

Two primary tensions in the SID office came from the observations. The first is George's reluctance to break his long-standing love affair with the basic job task of the SID -- handling a sport. His hanging onto a part of the daily operations of football, rather than relinquishing those duties completely to become strictly the office's superior, has resulted in frustration and tension for the staff. This finding manifested itself late in the study when Marie was being considered for another position at another university. This statement confirms her frustrations:

There is a communication problem with George for everybody and I think now that I'm thinking about leaving it's drawing more attention to it. I've worked too hard to be in that situation. I've gone to George with some issues, and the response I got from him was, "I'd leave if I were you."

He hired me to serve in the role as office administrator, but I don't have any power. Vince Jones has given me a greater role in the office; I love the title, and I have the responsibilities to go with it in name only.

George doesn't have any idea how good we could be. We've got a great staff. The staff could be mentored more. There is a communication problem

because he doesn't care. That's just my feeling. The only way I want to stay here is if there's a role in football for me.

Most sports information directors would readily admit that working with a sport's coaches and athletes are the major sources of pleasure and inspiration in the SID profession. However, the increased responsibilities placed on George by athletic administration should call for a re-alignment of the office hierarchy. This discovery is the primary source of tension in the office.

Secondly, George's strong avoidance of interpersonal conflict is a major issue threatening the balance of the office's communication culture. Directly related to his refusal to give up direct contact with a sport, this management issue beats at the heart of the office's culture. It can be concluded that his self-admitted avoidance of conflict severely diminishes the morale of the entire staff. By avoiding conflict and refusing to deal with the daily work related issues, George has driven a wedge into the center of the office's communications culture. Subordinates look to their superior to make hard decisions and to act as the manager of the office. In this work environment, the lack of a consistent pattern of management, and subsequent lack communication of expectations and requirements, have furthered the culture of separateness.

## CHAPTER 6

### ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

A few days after the biggest game of the year against inter-state rival Northeastern State; George called me into his office and said, “Come look at this ... you’ll see a big reason why I think we lost the game last weekend.” I expected to see a statistics sheet broken down with rushing and passing yardage, kickoff returns or the number of penalties. George directed me to his flat-screen computer monitor, which displayed a full-frame picture of a Northeastern offensive lineman with his hands clutching the jersey of a Southeastern defensive player. George said sarcastically, “Last time I checked, this was holding.” He showed me several similar photos simply by clicking on the small thumbnail shots arrayed across the screen of his computer. Needless to say, I was fascinated by the use of the computer to communicate basic information about a sporting event, and how the plastic and glass monitor had become a cultural icon in the culture of SID office.

James Lull (2002, p. 1) presents the term ‘Communication Age’ as an umbrella term to “broaden, humanize, and make more accurate a description and interpretation of this exciting era.” He notes that information technologies have sped up and altered some of the ways human beings communicate. Yet, in his opinion, the motivations behind the practices and actions that people use to construct their social and cultural worlds, remain virtually unchanged (Lull, 2002).

Lull believes that electronic communication has become an ever-powerful influence in the shaping of the culture of communication; that the efficient transmission of digitized bits and bytes has radically changed the way we communicate, and yet, despite the increased usage of the personal computer,



wireless telephone, and the personal digital assistant in our daily communicative lives, he maintains the way we shape our communication behaviors are the same. In a sporting context, the statement that information technology has become our dominant mode of human communication can be better defined through an intensive qualitative study using an ethnography of communication. Other methodologies may obtain data at the surface of this issue, but my longitudinal observations conducted over months of data collection, will reveal clear details on how the computer has evolved into the SID's primary method of communication.

### Old School vs. New School

The confirmation of the PC as the central communication device in the SID office is one of the foundational findings of this study. The computer has become the central icon in SID culture. Every member of the staff uses it; it is also a temple, a close companion, and for a small part of the day, a communication device. It has evolved into as close as one get to a religious symbol for the staff. However, despite the PC's widespread use, there were those SID's who disdained this paradigmatic change in sports information's basic communications culture. The battle lines of this cultural struggle raged along the lines of "old school" SID's, or those who remained loyal to verbal communication, either face-to-face or via the telephone, deployed against those "new school" individuals, a younger, more computer-hip generation who believed in almighty PC as the number one way to communicate. In the SID context, I discovered that the term 'electronic communication' meant the use of email, the Internet, the transmission of photos or PDF's via email attachment, and web page design and submission.

George and other veteran members of the staff had a strong opinion about the use of electronic technology in the SID office, both pro and con:

I am upset that our culture has gone to that, but there are advantages. There is no substitution for talking on the phone or in person. That's why I'm out talking to booster groups, or traveling with teams when I can. I don't think that PR people are out there anymore. You don't want writers just coming to a game ... you want to talk to them. I'll wander around and make sure I'm talking to everybody. I put all the

opposing team writers together and I always stand there for two or three series in case they want to say something. That's trying to get feedback. Did they have trouble parking their car, or was the food awful. I need to know. It comes down to I'm selling this place. The best thing that can happen to me is when a writer walks out of this place and hey; you're doing a hell of a job.

Stan put it bluntly:

I hate it. I hate it. It's because of the way I was taught. I worked back when we had telecopiers. It used to be I had to call you and converse with you to ask you, "Hey, can you hook your phone into your telecopier?" Now, you don't even need to speak to an opposing SID before they might get to your place. And that sucks.

Email is a cop-out. You send a guy an email because you're afraid to talk to them. I was taught to pick up the phone and talk to somebody. If that keeps me here an extra few hours a day, then so be it.

George also mentions his school's young athletic administration and the fact that he doesn't take full advantage of the electronic hardware available today. Both support the 'old school, new school' supposition I've made:

Our communication is 80% pushing 90% of our time on the computer. Our administration is young and they understand the importance of the computer as a communications tool. I'm still way behind my four full-timers on what's going on now. It's an avenue for stuff. I don't take advantage of much of the stuff. I didn't care when we had old dated Macintosh computers because I could still get on the Internet. Now I can't believe we actually used those. We spend a dramatic amount of time on the computer.

Marie, a self-admitted 'old school' SID, noted:

I use the phone the most. I'm starting to use email more, but I don't like it as much. I feel like email is good when you can't make calls at night because you can spend an hour returning emails, but I still think the phone is more effective. You never know if someone's going to get an email, or read it. You get so many that you might not read them for 3 days.

You sure use email here. I think I'm starting to catch onto it more because of the convenience of it. If they need something, I email it to them. It depends on the urgency of the request.

Arnie was another heavy user of email, but he also was a bit of a dissenter:

Email makes a huge difference. Email is my main way to communicate. The FAX has almost become obsolete. I don't think it's good we use the computer so much and we don't talk to people. You don't know someone if you send them an email. You don't have a voice, or a face; you just have an email address.

Betsy said:

I find myself falling into it (email) more and more. Email is the way you learn everything around here. If their (the staff's) email is down, you can literally hear them screaming down the hallway, "Is anybody else having a problem with their email, call Bill, call Sue, get somebody up here now." (Sarcastically, she added): "You know you're going to miss something if you're down for 10 minutes." People tend to be braver through email, than they would in person. It's also part of the problem because people banter back and forth over things and don't sit down and talk about them one-on-one.

George did admit, grudgingly, that there are advantages to the use of the personal computer to communicate:

Even if you're not in favor of it like I am, you get caught up in it so easy. The nice part of electronic communication is that it moves intrusion to a new level. I can send an email about a player that they can receive when they want. It's a little bit more benign way of communicating, which can be productive in our end of it. If I have something I want to send, or I'm trying to shop a player to the guy, as well as I know him, or he's on deadline, he's rolling his eyes on the other end the timing of the intrusion of a phone call is key. The advantage of email is ... I can send him a thing ... "Hi, I know you're busy, it's from Rob, I'm selling you on the player, and read it when you can."

A key finding was the use of the computer to hide from human communication.

George said:

Everyone hides behind the computer, including me. When somebody comes in that I don't want to see ... I just say, "Boom, I've got to get this out."

The "right now" urgency of the Communications Age has fostered a major change in the communications culture of the SID office. George said it best:

What electronic culture has done is change the immediacy of our job. It used to be people (writers) would work a week ahead of time. Now, they work an hour ahead of time. And they expect you to drop everything to do what they want right now. They expect me to send them something, and they expect it within the day. Fortunately, we can accommodate that sometimes. They just don't understand. The demand level has been raised so high, that we haven't gotten anywhere by using the computer. Our job is harder. It's easier to get done, but it's harder.

The 'new school' SID's in the Southeastern office were demographically younger in age and they mentioned having grown up with the computer. The cultural implications of this statement indicate a generational change in the culture of communications. The poster child for this younger SID generation was Lisa. She confirmed my generational hypothesis by saying:

I like it (the computer) personally because I grew up in that age. I'm more familiar with it than other methods. It's extremely important to communicate using technology.

I love the computer because you can say what you need to say, but you can't control your tone. It's a flat, business-like tone that does not portray any personality.

Stan, the office's reputed computer expert, is solid in his belief that the computer has replaced verbal communication as the number one communications device in the SID office:

There are more things you can do on the computer now, especially with the Internet. It's been great for us because we're able to disseminate the information to more people than ever in a shorter amount of time. This business has the basics that you have to do. It's up to you if you want to do more. That's what the computer has allowed us to do.

I've only been working in here in the computer age, but you still have to deal with reporters and your sports and getting coverage. So, the overuse of the computer has probably hurt us a little bit.

I probably spend the whole day on my computer. Surfing to get ideas, and other things. Keeping the website fresh is a big thing now. You have people coming in and not having something new to read. I do a lot of the design aspects, game programs, game notes which is a huge chunk of time. That is a debate in my sports because you put a lot of time into them and they don't get used.

Lisa's next statement flies in the face of what George, Stan and Marie hold to be a basic SID communication technique – verbal communication:

There's rarely, rarely a day when I talk to another's school's SID. Usually it's kind of through email. Like when we played Georgia State in tennis ... they didn't email, but called instead and asked if we'd FAX them the results. I told her it would be easier to email the results.

I saw examples of this repeatedly during the observations where the staff would send emails to opposing SID's requesting information, or providing information, without picking up the telephone and communicating with the other human being. Scott Strauss also mentioned a huge time commitment to the PC:

Out of eight hours, I probably spend six hours a day on the computer. We definitely have switched over to an electronic culture. We rely on the computer so much. I remember what it was like a few months ago when I didn't have a computer. I had to go from office to office to get things done. It used to be I could do my job on the typewriter and fax machine, and we'd call more, but now, we do everything on computer.

There are dangers of overuse of the computer to communicate, especially to the consumer. Betsy notes the frequency of this:

When I first started working here, there was no web site. The majority of my day was taking phone calls from the outside on players, games, times, scores, everything. Now, that's the least thing I do. People who call now are older generation people who don't have computers. It's funny because they'll

say, "Don't tell me to go to the website, I don't have a computer. I don't use those things."

Stan was the most avid opponent against the use of electronic communications:

It's crap that we're using electronic communication so much. Getting the information in a timely manner is the most important thing. Talking to them is vital. It's not a little component, it is the component. What are we going to do ... change numbers? Picking up the phone is the most important thing we should do.

I've put together a pretty good email list to send out a basketball release ... 150 people or whatever it is. However, if Brad Daugherty and Vince O'Brien are doing our game, as soon as I find out, I'm calling them. I'll tell them, can I get you on the phone with Herbert Vlasic ... he scouts the opponents. With a basketball game on TV, I need to do whatever I can to make it a two-hour infomercial on Southeastern State basketball.

The old school, new school dyad is divided on whether the telephone or the computer is the preferable communications device for SID's. The old school staff members were trained during an era when public relations specialists were taught that one-on-one interpersonal communication was the most essential element in good media relations. Their primary tool of choice is the telephone. However, the new school members clearly eschewed the phone in favor of the PC. I would suggest this as a major cultural change in the sports information profession because the fundamental nature of communications has evolved away from interpersonal human interactions, to one of an impersonal message on a computer screen.

#### Email as Communication Device

A subsection of importance of this study is the use of electronic technology to communicate with fellow staff members who are sometimes only 10 feet away. The office space issues mentioned earlier heavily influence the increased use of email by the SID staff. Since they are located a large distance apart, the three different staff office locations (George and Betsy, the full-time assistants and the graduate assistants), created the need to communicate quickly via email. The full-time

assistants used the aforementioned 'over the wall' method, but this was unavailable to the other groups. The observations did reveal a major reduction of the use of the telephone by staff members to ask questions, or request information from the other groups.

George said:

I'm more apt now to send an email to the staff down the hall. Part of it's geographic now, rather than speed. I'd rather talk to my people. I do communicate more verbally to my people, but to others on the staff, I communicate about 50-50 with email. My first inclination is to pick up the phone, but you get that busy schedule ... it's habit that is changing. It used to be 70% I'd pick up the phone. Now it's 50%.

Marie said she'd rather yell down the hall than send an email:

Occasionally, George will send an email about our staff meeting, which is ridiculous, because he should go out in the hallway. I'm not going to send an email constantly. That doesn't work for us.

There have been a few times when we've had a miscommunication because he emailed something rather than picked up the phone or yelled. People do hide behind emails, because you can always say, "I didn't get that email."

Scott said he uses email to communicate internally, but still relies on the verbal message:

With each other, if it's a bigger project of sorts, we'll use email. But if not, it's easier to walk over there and ask them. If I need supplies for something like that, I'll send an email. Betsy's all the way on the other end of the hall, so it saves a trip.

Lisa had the same message:

If I need to document something like with office issues ... we need toner for the copier ... I'll email it, so I can say afterwards, "I emailed it." If I need to find out if George's down there, I'll call Betsy. Or with Marie, I'll call. I email people a lot. However, I'll usually talk to them unless I have to send something like a picture.

### Worship of the PC

Repeatedly in my field notes, I found references to items like ‘every time I walk into the press box, the entire staff is engrossed in the computer.’ I counted seven times a similar notation was written into the notes. This is significant because the SID’s were using the computer for nearly every job function they performed. I observed them writing press releases for placement on the department’s website, doing page layout for football programs, or a sport media guide, sending emails, compiling statistics, writing game notes, and yes, playing the requisite game of solitaire. Every job function in the office was directly aligned to that of the computer. In a time when electronic technology dominates our culture, this is not unexpected. However, by observing this phenomenon day after day, month after month, I am clearly able to conclude that the SID worships the computer, and it has become a demigod in the culture of the SID.

### Other Electronic Devices

The staff used other electronic communication devices during the study, but their importance to the overall communications culture was minimal. I observed George using his telephone’s intercom only three or four times during the study, and this was to ask a question, or to round up staff members into his office for the weekly staff meeting. During home football games, select staff members had a walkie-talkie to communicate with each other, but this occurred only six times during the entire duration of the project. Of special note is the diminishing importance of the FAX machine. As Betsy noted in the chapter on verbal communication, the FAX is used minimally now, and primarily for the media to request credentials to football games. I recall when I began a job at Rollins College in 1987; the entire college at that point possessed only one FAX machine. One! And now, just 17 years later, the FAX machine is almost obsolete. This finding confirms the dominant impact of the personal computer on the communications culture.

The study clearly found that electronic technological methods have become the primary method by which the sports information office at Southeastern State communicates not only with each other, but also with their external constituents.



Despite this clear conclusion born out by the field observations and personal interviews, the 'old school – new school' debate over whether the computer is superior to the telephone as a communications device, rages at SSU. This powerful change in communications culture is very evident at Southeastern State.

Second, the debate over the use of email to communicate with the media, and with other in the office is also a widely argued concern for the SID staff. This issue is also aligned with the veteran SID's taking an opposite position from the newer members. The vets denounced its use, while Generations X and Y claimed it provides a powerful weapon in the battle for media attention.

The cultural issue I raise is that email has become a device that allows the SID to hide behind the computer, rather than have to communicate interpersonally with other humans. The passive nature of the computer allows a timid, or lazy SID to simply click 'send,' and be done with the communications effort. This finding directly correlates with McCroskey and Richmond's (1982) four-trait scale of communications personalities. McCroskey and Richmond mentioned the four traits of the Shyness Personality Trait, the Willingness to Communicate Trait, Assertiveness-Responsive Personality Trait and the Compulsive Personality Trait. The old school members of the office would be aligned with the Willingness to Communicate Trait; members that are aggressive in their communication style. By contrast, the new school members could be seen as having the Shyness Personality Trait, or the concept of shyness, where members avoid communication. Therefore, a culture of avoidance is a major component in the communication world of the SID office.

## CHAPTER 7

### NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

One quiet morning during the middle of the fall, I arrived in the press box about 9:30 a.m. and found Jack working at his computer. I figured I would sit down with him for a few minutes to find out what had been going on around the office. What happened next became a defining element of the office's communication culture. I stood at the door of Jack's cubicle and asked him how the conference basketball press conference went the previous week in Kentucky. Jack, without moving his body away from his computer, and turning only his head toward me ... without making eye contact ... said, "John Boskovich first team ... team's sixth ... the coach is pissed." He then turned back to his work and did not continue the conversation or add more information. Although there is a brief verbal element to this interchange, the body language and strong sense of avoidance in Jack sent a very clear non-verbal communications signal to me. I came to define this communication technique as the *talk vs. the turn*.

I must clarify the importance of this concept because every member of the staff used this not only with me, but also with each other at some point during the study. There are two elements to the *talk vs. the turn*. The talk, as I've described above, occurs when a staff member wishes to send a strong non-verbal message to another person regarding their availability for communication. I define this scenario as 'I'm very busy, don't bother me, I'll get back to you later.' I use the word 'talk' because the individual uses a short, curt verbal reply combined with a very clear body message to define their communicative status. By contrast, the turn is when the staffer turns the entire body toward the questioner, makes eye contact, and begins an interpersonal exchange that is pleasant, more relaxed and in a normal

tone of voice. These two particular terms became vital components in discovering the deeper meanings of the communication culture in the SID office.

To discover the cultural meaning of these two terms, I turned to the staff for further explanation. I did find that many of them were not even aware that they were using these non-verbal methods on a regular basis. George admitted some knowledge of non-verbal communication and its implications:

I took a non-verbal communications class when I was here as a student and I really learned a lot about how people communicate. I think about it every day.

He provided this example to show just how aware he is of this method:

It was a big day for me when I moved the computer over to this side of the desk (the front). Now, I can see people coming and they can't see what I'm doing. It's a whole new dynamic. I felt like I am a lot more open because I don't have my back to the door. I'm concerned if I'm talking with you and I've got my arms crossed; do I uncross them, or do I want them crossed. I don't normally, but I'm sensitive to that. I am body conscious.

George, despite his sensitivity to non-verbal communication, fell into the SID culture's normal pattern of avoidance of communication, by using the 'talk':

People can tell when not to bug me. Especially in my office or in the press box during a game, if someone starts to address me, I don't turn at all. If I don't want to talk, I don't turn toward them.

A fascinating dynamic that several different staff members mentioned during the interviews was the extrasensory nature of non-verbal communication in the office. Several mentioned the familiarity that is bred from spending so much time together, and that they could sense when someone was 'in the zone' or needed help. Stan was the one who directly mentioned the telepathic nature of communication in the office:

Because of our time together, we can read each other's signs pretty well. We know when someone's having a bad day. It's just like anybody you've known for a long time, you get to know them. Jack's probably the easiest to read,

he'll bang a fist, slam the door, or a curse word might come out of the blue (laughs). I think the familiarity is a major reason.

We're in our office and we're facing the computer and someone will come in and you can't even see them. But, you can tell what kind of day they're having, or whether they want to talk, or whether they're mad about something. It's not a visual thing, because we don't see each other, even when we're in the office.

Jack, who Stan says he could read his non-verbal signals easily, said:

My co-workers know that when I'm working on game day, don't bother me. It becomes more important when I'm on deadline ... don't bother me. Don't ask. Just don't.

Scott also confirmed how the staff communicates in this manner:

There's a sense that we can tell, when hey, I've got something to do. You just look and see what someone's doing, and you know when not to spend too much time there. It's primarily from the responses you get and the listening.

Arnie said:

You can walk by someone's office and just look and you'll be able to tell if they want to talk. When you've been around somebody that long, you can tell when they want to talk.

John added this:

We can tell If they're too busy at the time, they're on the computer, or running around getting ready for game day ... it's done with facial expressions, hand gestures and movements ... you can just tell when they're busy.

Betsy said:

When you get the certain body movements, you get the o.k. to stay a second and talk.

This use of the *talk* vs. *the turn* was also displayed as an anti-hierarchical device to maintain the culture of separateness between George and the GA's. Lisa gave this example:

Whenever George comes down to our office, and Strauss and I are there, we don't usually turn around. He just usually comes and stands over us and then we have to talk to him. We don't stop what we're doing or turn away from the computer. With George we just give direct answers and he pushes us to be friendly, but we just want to keep this where it is.

George confirmed the staff does try to keep him at arm's length, and he also mentioned the telepathic way the staff communicates non-verbally. However, he points out that despite this culture of avoidance by the staff, he tries hard to establish connectedness with his staff:

I think some of them think my presence is a threat. I can sense it.

Sometimes I tease about it. They could really take advantage of me if they wanted to because of the separateness. But, I do have workers. I trust them. I do stick my head in there and it's just to engage them sometimes. They're in there hacking out a softball release and I just want to say, "Hey, what's going on?" When they're working away and they feel isolated from the world, and nobody cares about them, especially our administration, I want them know they will get some positive reinforcement from me.

Betsy added this example on what messages George's non-verbal communication walking around management style sends to different people:

Sometimes he walks in and starts thumbing through the mail, and just like that, it pisses me off. "I'm the one that distributes the mail; don't mess with my system." But he usually puts it down, and walks back into his office. And I'm thinking to myself, "That's kind of stupid of me." I didn't say anything to him, but I was upset with him (to myself). He's come in here before and kind of stood in the door and then walks off, and I just say, "O.k., he's either thinking, or he's writing and needs a break," so I'll ask him if he needs something, and I just think it's just a connection he needs. I've seen him do this to other people. He may lean in the doorway and ask them how they're doing, or ask about personal things.

In summary, the *talk* vs. *the turn* is the primary non-verbal communication patterns discovered in the SID office. The 'talk' as I've described it, sends a clear

non-verbal signal as to exactly what the communicative readiness stage the staff member was in at the time. By using this method, the staff member very clearly indicates they are disengaged from any form of interpersonal communication and are focused on job tasks. They do not desire any further communication at this time, so go away and leave me alone. The 'turn' by contrast was displayed when the person was more accepting of taking a few minutes to talk with the visitor, whether it was me or another staff member. The clear distinction between these two terms was the body movement (or lack thereof) that was included with the choice of the 'talk' or the 'turn and talk'

The use of these two communicative techniques defined a big part of the culture of the SID because the 'talk' became a defensive weapon in the battle to get work done in the haphazard, interruption-filled environment of the office. Through this method, the SID's could get their job done without having to resort to shutting the door and thereby negating the expressly desired openness and free exchange of communication that is sought after in this culture.

### Body Language, Eye Contact and Gestures

Another theme that arose during the observations was how body language, eye contact and other gestures were used to communicate non-verbally during the study. As I've already described, the *talk vs. the turn* includes all three of these elements; however, this method was only used when the staff member was sitting in their office at the computer. Two scenarios I observed that provided the most evidence of other types of non-verbal communication were during staff meetings and at home football games.

I will admit that the non-verbal communication culture of the SID, aside from the obvious cultural element of the *talk vs. the turn*, was not a major element in my field notes. The verbal communications that occurred between the staff captured more of my attention during the study. However, I did find several things to note during my observations.

Confirmation of the informal atmosphere of the SID office came from observations during staff meetings. In a stereotypical business meeting, the

participants normally sit up straight, have their information spread out in front of them in an organized fashion and are attentive to the direction of the superior. In the SID staff meetings, the staff was in direct contrast to this model. My field notes describe the meetings with verbiage like 'joking, relaxed atmosphere, flippant, lackadaisical, good natured kidding, keeps it light, or never seems to be any tension.' The staff rarely arrived on time for the meetings, and George used his intercom to call people to the meeting. This became an indicator of both the work ethic of the SID's to finish projects; and yet, it was also a subtle signal of an anti-hierarchy conduct of staff members.

I described the hierarchical seating arrangement of the meetings in a previous chapter. This seating arrangement was significant because those that sat in the front row were generally more attentive to George and the flow of the meeting. The body demeanor of all the participants indicated a casual, almost disconnected nature. Most did not sit up straight, they were usually draped around the chair with their legs crossed at odd angles, and their body message was more aligned with that of disinterested college students who sit in the back row of a class than professional communicators. I also noticed that Marie, Arnie and Jack, the most experienced of the group, at times slumped in their chairs in a relaxed manner and rarely revealed any signs of tension or stress in their body mannerisms or eye contact. Arnie, SSU's football contact, at one point sat with both feet propped on George's desk and had his notebook on his knee.

For the most part, the staff did give George their attention and listened closely as he went through his list of agenda items. I did notice that on occasion the staffers would avert their eyes from George and gaze out the press box window down at the football field. This is another small indicator that the underlying anti-hierarchical communication issues in the office were indeed present here also.

I have referred frequently to the culture of connectivity that George has worked hard to invoke as his management style. His casual delivery style when reading the agenda became a standard in these meetings. His addition of jokes and general positive tone throughout was also a highlight of George's meetings. During

one SID staff session while a discussion about some old computers in the back of the GA's area was going on, George joked:

“If C3PO (of Star Wars fame) comes through, we'll get rid of them.”

The downside of this style observed in nearly every staff meeting became clear to me. Toward the end of meetings, side discussions between various different staffers would break out; joking and kidding around would distract from George, and he would lose the attention of the staff. The staff's non-verbal body language and gestures revealed to me that this end-of-meeting reaction was a subtle rejection of George's management style.

The non-verbal communication patterns of the SID staff were most evident at home football games. Due to the crowded press box, and the scattering of the SID staff throughout the stadium during the game, the need for and subsequent use of non-verbal communication became very apparent to me. The staff is intense, focused and in a highly reactive state. They are prepared for anything the media might throw at them in the way of requests or complaints. I made these references in my field notes to back this up:

- Jack had a frenzied look in his eye when I was talking to him
- Arnie was rushing running around solving problems
- Marie had an intense “I'll kill you if you talk to me” look in her eye

George painted a mental picture that verifies my observations of the SID staff on game day:

If I could take a picture of them at kickoff (SID staff) their faces would match that of the players on the field. I try to be neutral, and one of my goals is if we are losing a game, I want people not to be able to tell that. I'll collect them all in the back before the end of the game and say, “O.K., act just like you would if we won the game ... same smile, same effort, same speed.. do everything exactly the same.” I literally do that the few times we lose. I make sure we don't act differently.

As I observed the SID staff during each home football game, the image of a department store clerk on the day after Thanksgiving with 100 people in line waiting to check out came to mind. They were working as best they could, yet the tension



and stress levels indicated in their facial expressions, body language and eye contact was unmistakable – they were overburdened, yet ready to meet the needs of all that asked. Each of the staff members had a unique body language that displayed their unique way of non-verbal communication. George maintained his normal easygoing manner, yet moved faster, spoke more formally and was more abrupt in his communication with others. Marie, who warned the staff in advance that she most likely would yell at them during some course of the game, sent the strongest body signals – don't mess with me unless you're prepared to face the consequences. Arnie, who normally sends a slow-paced friendly demeanor via his body language, was even a bit more focused and quiet. I provide these examples to show the more intense nature of a home football contest and how the staff members clearly communicate its importance with their non-verbal communication methods.

In summary, I have presented three situations where the SID's displayed non-verbal communication during the study. The most important was the finding of the *talk vs. the turn*, which I feel, is related to the culture of separateness that is found within this office. The SID's use this technique to get things done in a hectic work environment. They also utilize it to avoid interpersonal contact, which is also a major element in the culture of avoidance that is prevalent in the SID office.

My observations of body language, hand gestures, eye contact, and other non-verbal communication expressions in the office were most recorded during staff meetings and home football games. The subliminal anti-hierarchical culture in the SID office was evident, but it was not a dominant element. What primarily came through for me in observing the SID's and their non-verbal communication, was that a tremendous amount of pressure and tension are on the SID's during their work day and despite their efforts to conceal it, their body language gave away their feelings and emotions.

## CHAPTER 8

### RITUALS AND ARTIFACTS

George relates two incidents surrounding the acquisition of press passes to home football games that reflect upon the importance of sports information rituals and artifacts in the culture of the SID office:

I remember a few years ago, a reporter from a TV station in Lexington, Kentucky gave his passes to our first home football game away to friends of his. They showed up in the press box dressed in orange jumpsuits with SSU symbols painted all over their faces. When I checked the passes, they were issued to the TV station. I immediately pulled the passes and haven't renewed them since. They sure would like them back. Another year, a TV reporter from Atlanta got a pass and showed up at Howard Huffnagle Stadium for the football game. We got a call that the writers couldn't get the door to the press box men's restroom open. We had to call police to break down the door, and they found this guy slumped against the door, passed out, stone cold drunk.

The power, status and accessibility that press passes provide the SID staff is a serious artifact in SID culture. Despite the fact they are used only five times a year, their symbolic importance to the bearer is a major factor in the culture and is part of the ritual of the press box at home football games.

Spradley (1980) pointed out that when a group interacts together over a period of time, a culture evolves. He noted the by-products of that interaction are *cultural behavior, cultural knowledge, and cultural artifacts*. The two comical incidents presented at the beginning of this chapter are but one component of the development of the culture of the sports information office. I will add that the

clearest ritualistic behavior of the SID staff that helps define the culture of communication is best observed during SSU's high holiday – the home football game.

### Rituals

Ritual, as defined in the *American Heritage College Dictionary*, is a detailed method of procedure faithfully followed or regularly followed; a state or condition characterized by the presence of established procedure or routine (Pickett, 2002). This differs from traditions, which are passed down from generation to generation, and due to the nature and time frame of this study, there is no way to clearly observe and analyze SID traditions. I clearly observed that the ritual of the home football game was as close to a regular, consistent routine the SID staff exercised during my entire study. I will point out that the occurrences shown in the following description of the press box during a home game week were followed almost exactly during the five home game weeks. The only differentiation from this routine came when the game was on national television, or the game was a major rivalry contest.

### The Press Box

I include the following field notes on the atmosphere inside the football press box to give the reader a clear sense of the physical setup, the range of communicative behaviors, and the tensions that are present in this temple-like environment:

After parking a mile away, and walking to the stadium, I immediately encountered a problem, which as it turns out, was not reflective of the atmosphere in the Huffnagle stadium press box during the SSU-Tennessee game. The line to get on the elevator was nearly 50 feet long, so being the good athlete I am, I walked up the stairs to the 9<sup>th</sup> floor press box.

Upon reaching the press box, there were three students stationed at a table at the top of the elevator to keep boosters and the like from entering the press area. One of the students was a member of the class I teach, so it was nice to see a friendly face. SSU has the reputation of being among the best at

doing 'football game day' so I entered the press box expecting to clarify that statement.

The press box, which was filled with mostly white males (I estimate 90%), was quite sterile and subdued in atmosphere. The overhead TV monitors were showing ESPN and the pre-game show for SSU-Tennessee and there was a lot of sportswriter chatter about what would transpire in the game. Football is to be experienced every day at FSU.

The physical setup of the press box was designed to implement good visual sight lines for the SID staff. The entire staff sits in the middle of the back row of the four layered press seating area so they can observe all media members at work. George Cashman stood the entire game while the statisticians and his assistants spread out to do their duties. Arnie was stationed on the field to handle the starting lineups and relay any concerns to the press box via walkie-talkie. Marie answered typed game notes and quotes as the game progressed. Jack answered the telephone to compile other game scores, Lisa was in charge of copying statistics, and Stan was the official statistician stationed at a laptop in George's office, which serves as the official stats area. I was impressed with how well everyone knew their duties. Cashman had on a white shirt and tie and a pair of Nike tennis shoes. This is a wise choice based on personal experience, because you walk an enormous amount during the course of hosting a home football event.

The media people I spoke to briefly during the game were very happy with how the press box at Huffnagle was operated. None expressed problems and said the SSU SID staff does about as well as anyone in the country. I mentioned the office space jumble during game day and no one (FSU staff) had a problem because the media basically come in and take over their space for the entire day.

Game day duties for the SID staff were broken up into four sections: 1) pre-game, 2) halftime, 3) media to the field, and 4) post-game.

Other staff handled various tasks ranging from answering the phone, helping the media, compiling statistics, and the unenviable collating of the mountain of statistics at the end of the game.

I was most interested in observing the modes the staff used to communicate with each other during home games. Despite being scattered all over the press box and the playing field (Arnie was on the field the entire game), the staff still knew their duties and responsibilities; there were no awkward moments when someone didn't know what to do, and the routine became ritual. After observing the staff during each of the five games, the question I asked the entire staff was, how was this ritual created? Several of them confirmed the lack of a written plan. The fascinating discovery about this particular SID culture was that oral tradition was used to pass down the responsibilities and expectations of each staff member during football games.

George noted that a formal written training manual does not exist, and that he uses a pre-season meeting to orally communicate the football game job duties to staff members. He mentioned the longevity of the current staff as justification for this manner of training (five of the seven staffers have been there four years or longer). I would conjecture that a lack of work ethic and the "We've always done it like that here, so why change" mentality are the reasons for this lack of a written football game day manual. From personal experience, it is a time-consuming, labor intensive effort to write an SID policies manual, so I believe George's reasoning is, 'Why should I work extra hard over the summer to produce a written piece that I can cover in a three-hour meeting'? Scott confirmed the use of oral tradition in preparing for football games:

There's nothing written down. It just kind of evolved. We know that Arnie's role is on the field. Marie answers the phone and does the notes. Lisa coordinates the back room and the stats, and the students do the grunt work. We (the staff) sat down at the beginning of the year, and George said, "This is what we're going to do for football." It changes each week if people are on the road and we switch things around. However, this is all done during the SID staff meeting on Tuesday and we confirm things on Thursday and Friday.

Stan added this:

There is no full time training. The first game of the year it's a trial by fire; after that you slip right back into it. It's worked real well for George since he's had the same group for four years.

His experience and that of Marie play a big role in making it run smoothly.

We have to spend most of our attention with the students, who are usually new and the first two or three games, there's a misstep here or there. With the fulltime staff, rarely is there something out of the ordinary or what's considered a screw up on game day.

John added more confirmation:

You have a meeting on the Thursday before the home game and we go over what we've got to do. If somebody's out of town, we have to find a way to pick up the slack. Game days, in pre-game or post-game, we know what we're supposed to do. You know your job during both of those, and during the game you're pretty much on call. If something needs to be done, you're there.

Much of the previous literature on sports information directors deals with how athletic directors do not seek the counsel of the SID for management decisions on matters of public relations. The following statement by George about the importance of his staff doing a national caliber job in the press box on game day supports this research:

An area I think most athletic directors miss the boat on is that sports information has a huge role in the perception of the overall athletic department. For the media, we are as big as anybody out there except for players on the field, and the coaches. Except for the team performance, we have as much impact on how the department is perceived as anybody. I've thought about this a lot, but when the *Chicago Tribune* comes in to cover Southeastern State vs. Tennessee in football ... they see what our team does on the field ... they hear Coach Akers. For four and a half hours, they deal with us. They never see the athletic director, they never see the trainer, they never see the campus ... they don't see classrooms. They deal with us. If

they come away from the press box feeling like, dang, they know what they're doing it, and they're having fun doing it, this is a hell of a place. And I've had media people tell me that before too, if for no other reason than one of our students busted their ass to get them stats. I've also had some people who've had a bad experience and didn't get the stats on time, or we overlooked him for stats. They might look at us and say, "Don't you hand out any stats during the game," and we've been handing them out all along. So his experience at SSU will carry over, so you can't tell me we don't have any influence on the perception of the school ... even if our team wins 68-0, that guy will come away thinking bad things about Southeastern.

I noticed during my observations of home football games that the staff appeared to be as keyed up as any football player dressed in blue and white and ready to run down hill into Huffnagle Stadium. Game day is an important part of SID culture because the staff plays the game by preparing the press box for the game with the news media, broadcast networks and visiting scouts, VIP's and other media personnel. George mentioned before one big game:

If I could take a picture of them at kickoff (SID staff), their faces would match that of the players on the field. I try to be neutral, and one of my goals is if we are losing a game, I want people not to be able to tell that. I'll collect them all in the back and say, ok act just like you did if we won the game ... same smile, same effort, same speed ... do everything exactly the same. I literally do that ... the few times we lose. I make sure we don't act differently from when we win a game. Do not act like this is the biggest game in SSU history. We've handled these types of games before, and we will again. So, it's just another football game, so let's treat it that way. Let's not get overly excited because it is Tennessee.

As energetic as that stadium is out there is before Tennessee, this press box is too before that game. The writers and broadcasters are excited, and the staff is excited too. Whenever I think that this job wears you down, if that Saturday doesn't get you going, then you've got to quit. I'm very much like a player or a fan. It's not the winning part of it. It's just exciting being part of

that. You've got to produce. Our team has to produce to beat Tennessee or Alabama or Kentucky; we've got to produce up here too. We've got national writers on deadline on a night game; our staff takes responsibility for that. Particularly Marie. I get mad when the stats aren't passed out, but so does Marie and so does Lisa. When I say it, they do too. They're trying to put on a good show too. They take a lot of pride in it to. Everybody takes on a role that has a lot to do with how well we do.

Stan confirmed George's management style to present a relaxed atmosphere at home football games:

On game day, George gets tense and uptight and may lash out at you, but he makes it easy for you to do your job. Because he knows what to do ... he's done it so many times. He keeps it light in a sense that it's just another game; he's done hundreds of them in his day and we've all done it.

The excitement of the high holiday of college football, as George said, is a primary motivating factor for the sports information director. Repeatedly during the interviews, the staff confirmed that without game day, they most likely would not remain in the business. It is the lifeblood of college athletics, and the stage where SID's engage in public performance of their duties. The thrilling atmosphere of a college football press box was not lost on me as I observed the SID's in action. Their physical demeanor and body language, urgency of foot speed, concentration in the eyes and the more rapid methods of communicating both verbally and non-verbally were exaggerated in this environment. The excitement and tensions of the game where the staff must service over 300 media members, including a national television broadcast, point to communications scenario where the SID must be well trained and prepared for any situation. Betsy mentioned how the stress levels increase significantly as game day approaches:

On a business level, home football it is a ritual. The closer you get to a home game; you can feel the change in the air... the tension, the excitement. It does take on a kind of holiday excitement. The tension and the frustration definitely go up, especially dealing with credentials. You have so many last minute changes, last minute requests, cancellations, and I also deal with the



hotel rooms, so I know on Thursday and Friday to make sure I have Tylenol in my purse.

It's a frustration and a tiredness, and things get harder as the game gets closer. But, the excitement level of the preparations ... you feed off everybody else. Everybody's excited. The frustrations don't turn into something negative. I worked in the math department, and I worked in the business office, and it was like, o.k., it's football game, so what?! You had more parents around and maybe they wanted to look around the building. Here, you've got Lynn Swann coming in, you've got Lee Corso making his grand entrance, you've got ex-players coming in, and I think that part of the excitement is different. It's like at Christmas... you never know what's going to come around the corner. It's also like being in front of one of those tennis ball machines, and you've got a racquet in each hand, and it's on double time, and you're going to get hit if you don't deflect what ever comes at you. As the week goes on, the faster the tennis balls come out of the machine. Then, the last hour of the day on Friday, I'm sitting here and it's like everything stops. It's because everybody's been taken care of. Wham... you hit that wall, and you're like, o.k., now I can relax and start it again next week.

Communications between the staff during the actual game, as I observed, are very limited. As I mentioned earlier, the staff is deployed in different areas of the press box and on the field. Arnie is stationed on the field to check the starting lineup, deal with photographers and sideline reporters. The others are either in the statistics booth (which also serves as George's office), in the main press box or in the main area in the center of the press box where the tables are set up for writers to eat, find the statistics and write their stories at the game's conclusion. Several of the SID's have walkie-talkies in case a problem crops up that needs immediate attention. I also noticed that George would gesture for an assistant or a student to come to him in his spot at the top of the press box if he needed someone to run an errand or solve a problem.

George's stated intent of keeping his staff poised and calm regardless of the outcome of the field was followed very closely. As I mentioned in the chapter on

non-verbal communication, the body language and the look in the eyes of the staff during the game gave away the stress and tension on them. Marie, the admitted most emotional member of the staff, said she warns the staff and students in advance of how she acts on game day:

The first thing I said to the GA's at the beginning of the year is that I can be the biggest bitch that you know. However, if you work hard and do a great job, we'll have a great time. I said to them at the first football game, I want to let you know, I get uptight, I'm nervous, and it's not walk ... it's run. You're going to see me lose it, I'm going to cuss, because we're here to do a job and do it well. I want to make sure they know that's how it's going to be. I tell them in advance that if I lose it during the first game, and if I cuss at you, don't take it personally. And I did, I lost it and yelled at them, and then they said, "Well, you warned us." I said, "Exactly." I'm a very emotional person; I have high expectations for people here and the job we do. When those aren't met, I get frustrated and let it out.

She also mentioned that her entire life experience is framed by college football game day, even when the team is on the road:

My life is framed around the football season. And it's not even because I do that much football. Once you're here, you're consumed by it. Things that happen in my personal life ... well, that was Vanderbilt weekend rather than September 9<sup>th</sup>, or when he called me, it was the weekend of the Auburn game. We don't have a normal life. I can't imagine life without college football. It's my favorite time of the year. I make sure I book my day around Game Day on ESPN, whether I have to be here or not.

One funny thing, during the South Carolina game (I was home watching on TV), I was looking up things in the media guide. I had to know, when was the last time we only scored three points in a half against Carolina ... The GA's were saying, "Tina, you don't have to look that up." But, I had to know it. I was obsessing.

The quixotic world of the college football press box, with its diverse range of SID's media, VIP's and workers, the tension and the excitement, is one the major rituals in

sports information culture. George prepared his staff for each big game like that of an expectant head coach. He cautioned them about getting too 'fired up' and staying calm and doing their jobs "the same way we've always done it." In reality, the press box world of the home football game where all generations of SSU SID's learn the ritual via oral tradition and work extra hard to further the school's reputation as one of the top box operations in Division I-A college football, is the major ritual performed by the SID's. It is the dominant element in the lives of the staff for the entire year. As Marie said, "it frames my life." After observing the staff for five home games, I couldn't agree more.

### Food in the Press Box

I initially started to list food in the press box for home football games under the artifacts section. However, after reviewing my field notes, I concluded that this seemingly normal happenstance had become a major ritual not only for the SID staff, but also for all those attending home SSU football games. The following statement by George sealed this finding for me:

I remember before one game a few years ago, a couple of writers were at the stadium three hours before game time. I asked them why, and they said they came early for the food. They say they love coming to games because of the food. If the athletic director came to me and asked me whether I wanted to feed the media ... I'd probably say, no, just open up a concession stand. But, I realized that there is a function to it. It's hard for a media guy to stand in line to get food. However, the whole thing has gotten kind of ridiculous. At this point, it would send a much more powerful message if I cancelled it. It would have nothing to do with my opinion of the media ... it now has much more to do with the actual function of the game. The PR part of it comes with improving the cuisine for a big game. I want to make a good impression with writers who come from all over the country. Bad press box food does reflect on you. There is press box food that is awful. So I'm not going to put crap out there.

Jack wasn't on the same side of the 'pro-food' issue as George:

Food in the press box is a crock. I understand that we have to feed the media ... it's expected. There is a ridiculous amount of people eating though.

These writers get here at 2:00 or 2:30 (for a 7:00 p.m. game) and they are there to eat. They make it look like they're watching an SEC game, but they're waiting for the food to be put out. It's incredible. It's part of what we do though on game day ... I eat for free too. One good thing is that there are some papers, the *Washington Post* for example, that sends us a check at the end of the season to pay for the food.

There are some individuals in the sports information business who profess that the media does not need to be fed at home games. Athletic directors at some schools, who get upset over the media's criticism of their program, prevent SID's from feeding the media at games. I would argue that food, a basic component of human sustenance and social interaction, helps generate a huge positive public relations benefit for the institution. During my observations, I too ate the excellent food in the Huffnagle Stadium press box along with hundreds of other people. I noticed that many individuals would go back through the line multiple times, would hit the soda machines frequently during the game, and the popcorn and peanuts that were put out at halftime quickly disappeared and were even hoarded by some writers.

In summary, football home games are not only a ritual for college football fans but for the SID staff as well. As I described earlier in this chapter, each SID staff member has a specific job task they perform during the ritual of the home game. Whether it be George lording over the press box from his back row position, or Marie typing quotes, or Stan clicking away on official stats on a laptop, or Lisa arguing with student interns on the speed of collating stats, the rites of the home football game are conducted by the staff five times a year. As the definition states, a ritual is a faithfully followed condition characterized by the presence of established procedure or routine. The key words faithfully followed and routine define a key component of SID culture at SSU. The oral tradition in preparing the staff for the game, the excitement and subsequent tension that builds up as the game approaches, and the heightened tension during the actual contest are all key components that add to the communicative culture of the sports information director.

## Artifacts

The *American Heritage College Dictionary* defines artifacts as objects produced or shaped by human craft, especially those of archaeological or historical interest (Pickett, 2002). Obviously, dirt and vines do not cover the press box at Howard Hufnagle Stadium, so the archaeology dig can safely be discarded. However, as several staff members mentioned during the interviews, SID's serve as the archivists and historians for the intercollegiate athletic program. I will also describe the types of artifacts produced by the SSU sports information staff and the how they affect not only the culture of the office, but that of the entire athletic program.

Several staff members mentioned the historical value of their artifacts and their role as archivists for the athletic department. There is a value in preserving history especially in college athletics where fans clamber for a taste of the past and the stories and statistics of long departed heroes. At many programs, if the SID of the 1930's and 1940's did not preserve the records, the achievements and accomplishments of SSU sports stars would be forgotten. A major debate among the SID staff (that is also occurring nationwide) that I will address later in this chapter is the battle over the paper culture in the SID profession and efforts to move to electronic technology.

George used an historical analogy to define the importance of SID artifacts to college athletic programs:

Media guides are dramatically important because of the history. When people ask what the most important Inventions were in the history of world are, the printing press usually is one of the first things mentioned ... it may be the first thing. Today, the computer is changing that, but I still think that the media guide, particularly in printed form, is the history of the school.

John stated it similarly:

I think the media guide is pretty important. Its sole purpose is for historical research. I had to go back and do some background research, and I was able to find it easy in old guides. If I were not able to go back into the

archives, it would be hard to find ... even looking through old stats for information for this year's guide. It's a quick and easy resource to use. In the long run, you just to have it to flip through it to find things.

Stan also confirmed the SID's place as historian:

Media guides are for history purposes. That's the most important thing. The actual photos ... statistics ... memories.

Until I began to observe and analyze the artifacts produced by the SID's, I could not comprehend the cultural significance of these pieces. I shall briefly describe the major objects, which are the primary elements in SID culture. They include:

- Press Passes
- Press Releases
- Media Guides and Game Programs
- Department Website

The SSU staff as I observed during the fall, spent the bulk of their workday producing artifacts. One day when the entire staff was actually in the office, I took a walking tour going from each staff member's office to the next. I followed the established hierarchical lines and began with George and Betsy, then moved to the full-timers and then finished at the kitchen where the GA's were housed. I recorded exactly what each person was working on. I include this from my field notes as evidence of the production nature of SID culture:

- Betsy was cataloguing credential requests
- George was writing a column for the department's internet website
- Arnie was writing game notes for that week's home football game
- Jack was transcribing notes from a press conference for use in a press release
- Stan was completing work on soccer game notes for an upcoming road trip
- Marie was looking over the final layouts for the week's football game program
- Lisa was working on a tennis media guide
- Scott was preparing a press release on swimming and diving for release on the website
- John was finishing up work on a game program for a home volleyball match.

This is the sum of activity I observed on a 30-minute walk through the press box offices. I conducted this type of observation several times during the study, and the notes clearly outline the productive nature of the SID's.

Marie, the publications coordinator for the SSU SID staff, provided a statistical breakdown of the astonishing number of printed and electronic artifacts produced by the staff during an academic year. She admitted that an exact number of printed releases, post-practice notes, game advances, post-game stories, and other press notes were "impossible to come up with." Here are exact figures for SSU's major printed artifacts:

- 16 Total Media Guides (all sports, including bowl and spring football guides)
- 29,500 Printed Football Media Guides.
- 35,000 Printed Home Football Game Programs
- 300 Game Programs per Home Football Game, Soccer, Volleyball and Softball (40 home events/ year = (12,000).
- 100 Game Programs per Game - Women's Basketball = 13,000 total
- 5,000 Men's Basketball Game Programs
- 3,000 Baseball, "Yearbooks."
- Game Notes (approximate figures) - Football (12), Men's and Women's Basketball (63), Baseball (24), Softball (28), Soccer (26) and Volleyball (33) events.
- Other Olympic Sports Notes are done as weekly releases
- Printed Credentials – Football (4,500); Men's Basketball (1,500)

A dramatic finding of the study was the discovery of the importance of Press Passes as a cultural icon in the SID office. I have distributed press passes for athletic events all throughout my own sports information career, but had never paused to consider their cultural value in the realm of the SID. The observations emphatically showed these small pieces of paper carried a powerful cultural meaning. The passes for SSU home football games are coveted and desired by media, friends, bowl scouts, fringe media personnel and anyone else who wishes to experience the world of the press box during a game. In my opinion, press passes represent a power mechanism that allows them to control the access and the hierarchy of the press box environment. George ultimately has the power to approve or reject any

person who requests a pass to home games. He takes this role very seriously and it cannot be emphasized enough that during my observations, I witnessed him spending hours and hours on home game weeks sorting, counting, prioritizing and shifting writers around based upon a hierarchical system ranking them from national, then state, then local writers. He also has a policy that all media outlets must FAX in a written request on their respective letterhead to his office. It cannot be emailed. He has the power and wields it through the pass. However, he defends this methodology saying he is much more liberal with the passes (than say conference rival Tennessee) because of a desire to promote the university to the media through the distribution of press passes to qualified media. George stated this about SSU press passes:

They mean control from my end ... a means of power. The letter the media sends me requesting them ... it has a certain amount of asking in it. There's an element of me wanting to make them ask. I've always been very free with my press passes, but it blends into that role of promoting the university. I don't do it to keep people out, but do control it so that we don't get too many people in there that will congest the press box and impair other people from doing their job. Small papers are welcome to come as long as they stay out of the way of other people doing their job.

Press passes are huge. No one in the department has any idea. The AD gives out 25 passes to the other team's AD, and you'd think he's running the White House. I told him once, "Do you realize I issued 600 passes for the Tennessee game, and you send one FedEx to one place and you worry about it?" I have to send it to 600 places.

Continuing the control theme, George explains why he handles press pass distribution:

A lot of SID's give the job to somebody else to do. The secretary in the department does it in a lot of places. I like to do it myself. I want it to be my fault if something goes wrong. If someone gets overlooked, I want it to be my



fault. I know what a pain in the ass it can be if somebody doesn't get a press pass.

He also discussed the philosophy behind his generosity with press passes:

We are a little more generous than say UT. We have space and it doesn't hurt to give out a few more. Also, for a long time we were fighting for publicity, so we let a lot more people in to game.

At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned the two humorous incidents that occurred with press passes. George told me that in all his years at SSU, no one had gotten a press pass using bogus methods:

I've never had anybody walk in here with a press pass that they got from somebody, or from the sports desk, the weather guy, and they were up in the press box somewhere inappropriate. They're either trying to get on the field where they're supposed to be or they are sitting in the stands.

The pressure to limit access and exert more control over the press box conflicts George. Perfect justification to do this would easily be the aggravation caused by lazy and inattentive media who are negligent in requesting one, or just plain forgot it. I witnessed this happen during every home game. George gets frustrated when this happens but never takes action. He stated this idle threat to me:

I'm going to start reining it in a little.

The rest of the staff weighed in on the importance of this top SID artifact:

Stan mentioned the hip factor:

It's like anything; it's a status symbol. I am cooler than you and I can get to places you can't get. That's all it is. It's a chance to sit up here in the A/C when it's hot or when it's cold. But, if you're a fan, you don't want to sit up here. You want to cheer and be a fan, you need to sit in the stands.

Another aspect that didn't occur to me until I discussed this with Betsy was security. She said:

Yes, the passes are for access to games, but now it's a matter of security. It's changed a bit. I've busted plenty of people who've tried to get passes. I heard that the campus newspaper sold one of their credentials for a game. We even have people who've made up paper names and FAX'ed in from their

home FAX machine. I've been here long enough to recognize names sound familiar. And if your outlet is not familiar to me, you're going to get checked up on. Then you find out it's a fraternity house you're calling or some such. I hate to throw that 9-11 thing up, but things take on a different feel now. The bigger the game, the bigger the role they take on.

Press passes are the single source of power the SID has during a home football game. The small, expensively printed pieces of paper allow George and his staff to limit access to the working press box, to establish a hierarchy system with national media and television at the top, followed by state and local writers. Passes are also, as Betsy said, a way to maintain the safety and security of those who are working at home football games.

Press Releases are the most frequently produced artifact of the sports information staff. As I discussed in the chapter on electronic communication, the majority of SSU's press releases are disseminated via email and on the department's website. I requested that the staff put me on the 'hack's list' for the duration of the study. The 'hack's list' is an extensive collection (150+) of writers and other media members who receive the SSU email. I would receive a minimum of two-three releases each day from the staff via email. The releases covered topics about every SSU sport, including advance stories on games, game results and announcements for media events. Clearly these are a key element of SID culture. George describes their importance and his continued reluctance to use them to their fullest:

When I started in sports information, I remember typing baseball stats by hand every night. I've gone through that, I'm still way behind my four full-timers on what's going on now. It's very much a community thing.

Particularly with Stan ... that's a world in there with him. It's not a world to me. I don't take advantage of much of the stuff. I didn't care when we had old dated Macintosh computers because I could still get on the Internet. Now, I can't believe we actually used those. We spend a dramatic amount of time on the computer.

George also bemoaned the cultural change in the nature of press releases due to the culture of immediacy fostered by the Internet. He also discussed his own personal philosophy of how releases should be written and disseminated

This is one of those situations where our job has gotten easier, yet has gotten harder. I dug through my files last year, and in 1983, our whole release was five pages long. Today, our men's basketball release was 19 pages. So what has happened since 1983 and now to change that? It's because there is so much more information out there, and it's so much easier to accumulate, and there are so many more places to put it. Now, when a press release gets posted on our website, theoretically, all SSU fans are reading it before the *Louisville Courier* picks up a paragraph.

The fuss I have with my staff is the amount of hours they spend on the press release. I never want to ignore a phone call from a writer when I'm trying to get my release done. However, I hear that all the time ... they say I can't get a darn baseball release from you. I'll go to the staff and ask them why, and they say I'm trying to get it done. Oh by the way, they've got a stack of phone calls four deep, but they're trying to get the baseball release done. And that is only an example ... it could be for any sport. Our staff writes volumes and volumes on game notes. I sit down with them and say, "How much of your release or game notes actually get in the newspaper?" I think it needs to be two pages of quickie notes and your stats.

TV has changed it though. Before, all you had were the newspaper writers. All they needed to know was who the starters are and what you've been doing lately, and what's coming up. Now, the TV guy has to talk about the game for three hours and he's bitching he doesn't know anything about the fourth string tight that just went in. Tennessee might have had that problem before, but we didn't. We weren't on TV for a long time. Now that we are, we need a more elaborate release. Today, you need two things: a two-page advancer for the papers, then a real elaborate release for the TV guys. We spend an awful lot of time on releases.

George's biggest problem with trying to control the proliferation of releases is the TV talking head factor. The immediacy of media today has created a major conflict for SID's. Do you serve the TV monster and avoid spending 18 hours a day in the office, or do you bend to the pariahs and produce 50 page football game day releases? George uses this example to explain exactly why there has been such a cultural change in press releases:

Part of the problem with this is there are some athletic programs that are out of control. Alabama's football release for our game was 54 pages long. I couldn't believe it. The problem you run into is what happens if Brent Musberger shows your release to the AD, and he says, you need to get your SID office on the stick. How do you react to that?

The main problem is they get feedback from Billy Packer, the TV guy, who'll say good job on the release. But, there are 30 writers who would have loved to have that thing at 10 a.m. in the morning rather than at 7:00 p.m. that night.

So we could have made 70 of them happy rather than one.

Scott also noted the importance of press releases, but pointed to the Internet as the primary distribution point:

We rarely mail these out anymore. The only times paper releases are handed out are at press conferences, on football signing day, or game notes at games. Paper releases are now used at events where you know you're going have people there. This has changed because of the timing of things. People want to see things right now. That's why we put things on the website. It's all on immediate demand.

Media Guides and Game Programs are artifacts where the creativity, resourcefulness and true production skills of the SID staff are displayed. They spend vast quantities of time, (sitting at the computer), doing layout, updating previous year's statistics, biographical sketches, and all the other research, writing and coming up with clever ways to attract the interest of a writer. George has strong feelings on the importance of the guides:

The media guide is our showcase; it's what the president of the university puts down in front of the president of IBM when he's talking about

Southeastern State, and it's what Sam Akers puts in front of the nation's best recruit.

We have been a lot slower than a lot of sports information staffs around the country to merge our guides with electronic communication. We only switched to electronic football stats two years ago. A lot of that comes from the fact I'm not educated in computers and frankly, my concern was somebody getting up to get a coke and unplugging the computer and we don't have any stats. Until people could reassure me that was never going to happen, I wasn't shifting. If you had a guy in my position who was more computer oriented, it would have shifted faster.

I would concur that the media guides and game programs are the most visible and sought after artifacts produced by the SID staff. I observed the SID's going through the start to finish process of brainstorming an idea, writing and updating and following the process all the way through from giving a computer disc to a designer, reading proofs and having the final book delivered to their offices for distribution. For football alone, the process is a year-round project. As soon as the season ends in December, planning for the next year begins. George has a philosophy of allowing the entire staff to have some part in the production of the football guide, the aforementioned showpiece. SSU's 2003 football guide was 364 pages long, which included a printed hard cover, so the vastness of the production cannot be taken for granted. George divides up the book into sections that every staff member participates in the writing. He describes the division of labor like this:

One of the things about sharing with my people, I want them to all share in designing the cover of the media guide. Unlike a lot of schools, we almost start at square one on every football media guide. We re-design the whole thing. The way it looks. They never look the same. We do that for a couple of reasons ... number one because of the challenge. It makes it fun. People look forward to our guide because they do change a lot.

Our media guide is a bit overwhelming when it hits your desk. We try to stretch those first 10 pages so that they are no overwhelming. I have in the past tried to do something on every page to pull people through the media

guide. I did it one year ... the 50<sup>th</sup> year of football, and did something on every page. I want it easy to read through the first five pages and keep reading before you realize it. Every time you open a Michigan guide it will be exactly the same. Ours is not like that.

The different sections of the football guide that must be produced include:

- Season Outlook
- Coaches Biographies
- Player Biographies
- Opponent Information
- Previous Season Review
- Information on Southeastern State University
- College Football General Background
- Honors and Awards
- Team Records
- Traditions
- Huffnagle Stadium Information
- Media Outlets

Marie is ultimately responsible for the final production of the guide. She works with George to determine the deadline schedule, who will write which section and work directly with a graphic designer to choose the look of the book, select photographs and keep the entire staff on task. As George stated, media guides are a vital printed artifact that the president of the university or the head football coach can use as a sales tool for fund-raising, friend-raising or recruiting the next Heisman Trophy winner. It can be concluded that this particular artifact is vital for sending a strong public relations image and also as an historical device.

The Department Website is arguably the most important artifact of today's modern SID office. I have previously mentioned the culture of electronic communication that exists in the SID office. I observed the extensive use of website to disseminate releases, photos, feature stories, schedules, statistics, and media guides for viewing by the entire sports world during the study. I found that accessibility and immediacy are now the buzzwords for the SID business.

In fact, Southeastern State University instituted a new athletics website campaign during my study that helped add an exclamation point to support my contentions about the paradigmatic change in the culture of communication. This

website was designed and implemented with a \$44,000 a year Webmaster to help counter the negative publicity generated by the media about the athletic program. I attended a meeting of athletic communicators during the fall attended by the athletic director, the university's PR director and other key communications figures in the athletic program. This meeting was to demonstrate support for the stated purpose of the website and to 'rally the troops' to using it and promoting its email distribution to thousands of boosters and media. Despite some initial reluctance by the SID staff (George mentioned it was "dropped on his office" and the webmaster is not part of the SID staff), the website has evolved into a popular click for SSU followers:

George emphasized the web's importance during the interviews:

I've said this in our senior staff meetings ...you all take your jobs and let me watch them 24 hours a day. The business office, every time you make an entry, put it on line and let me react to it. Coaches, put your game plan on there and let the whole world read it and respond to it. With my office, 24 hours a day, if the volleyball score is not on there 30 minutes after the match is over, we're hearing about it. If the accounting rolls are supposed to be done at 3:15 and it's 3:30 and they're not on there, let me react to it. That nips a lot of people in the bud.

He went to point out how the web has changed the production style of his staff:

This has made us more of a magazine thinking staff. Now my staff is thinking," Hey I can write a player feature about how they are a good citizen." There has never been a place to fit that in before in sports information. This new website is a way to do that, and it's really all our product. It attaches on to the main campus web site. The positive side of it is that it's forced us all to be more creative in our writing. It's made us realize we can be more creative, or that we can do something differently.

The culture of immediacy is once again reinforced by this quote:

We'll get people within our department calling here to find out the future football schedule because they know, we know. We have trainers calling and even the president's office will to find out things. And I want it that way. I want people to think positive about this place.

### Conflict Between Paper Culture and Electronic Technology

Another paradigmatic change in SID culture where the skirmish lines are once again drawn along the 'old school – new school' distinctions, is the contentious shift from a paper culture to electronic technology as the primary method of producing sports information artifacts. I alluded to the media guides, game programs and press releases in the artifacts section. Yet, in that section I also included as one of the artifacts the 'department's website.' This confirms the shift toward electronic culture in the SID office, but the veterans in the group cling firmly to the paper culture, as a baby would grasp its favorite blanket. In this section, I will describe the paper culture; present the old school/new school views on this finding, and then give evidence that the end is just over the hill for printed guides and releases.

The paper culture has always been a primary component of SID culture. The production of printed media guides is a central job task for the sports information director. Printed guides have long been the standard bearer for athletic programs as media tools, recruiting guides, and as George called them, 'coffee table material.' The media guide is a solid representative of paper culture, but game programs, game notes, statistics, printed press releases and a host other material printed or copied on paper are also part of this genre.

My first evidence of the paper culture was at the first SSU home football game. In my field notes, I describe a scene of flip cards, voluminous game notes, page after page of innocuous statistics, media guides from both teams, seating charts, written place cards telling writers where to sit; a snowstorm of paper from end to end of the vast press box. The paper was stacked neatly before anyone arrived, but once the media horde descended on the box, the paper began to flurry. Add to this storm a blast of napkins, cups, popcorn bags, candy wrappers, peanut bags and notebook paper, and you've got a paper storm to get the attention of a meteorologist. During the game, an army of smiling, compliant student workers was at the ready to help fuel the storm by distributing yet another page of statistics – first quarter stats, second quarter stats, drive charts, defensive stats ... you get the idea. At game's end, a major duty of two SID staff members was to assemble the final stats book (all copied onto paper), which for some games was nearly 30 pages long.



When you multiply that by 300 writers, several forests will need to be replanted. I include this field note verbatim to describe what I called a 'battle scene':

I arrived Monday morning to find the press box in disarray. It did not get cleaned after the Saturday night football game. I saw discarded releases, notes, cups, peanut shells on the floor, chairs askew, popcorn boxes, M&M wrappers. Jack said he was in the press box from 8:00 a.m. until 12:30 pm Sunday and saw the cleaning crew. They cleaned the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> floors and then did 9. They did not get to the press box. The box was left exactly as it was Saturday at midnight. The tables in public area were with covered with unused game quotes, stats, cups; ... the long tables were still set up in the public area (10 footers). The trashcans were full; there were 15 bags of peanuts left on one table. I asked myself if this scene was reminiscent of a battle; say the battle for El Alamein in the movie *Patton*.

Paper culture exists at football games. However, it also still exists in SID office culture. During the observations, I repeatedly witnessed the anticipation of the delivery of printed guides by the staff. After working on a media guide for months, the Christmas-like anticipation of the arrival of the books was paramount for the staff. Stan had just gotten the first shipment 17 cartons of soccer media guides, but they were waiting to be mailed out. He put it like this:

As soon as I can get them out, it'll be a good thing.

All throughout the study, as the boxes of media guides were delivered, a sense of relief and joy of seeing the staff member who produced the book exhibited the first printed copy. This scene was repeated several times as different books were completed. The ammunition dump like piles and piles of media guides proved paper culture is still part of the SID office.

But, a furious debate is raging on the national level to speed the move to electronic media guides. In 2003, SSU's conference forwarded proposal number 03-88 to the NCAA, which would eliminate the production of all printed media guides (Greenstein, 2004). In his April 24, 2004 story, he states that just days before the NCAA vote, the conference pulled its proposal off the table. Greenstein called the move 'unusual' considering they had sponsored the proposal, which argued schools

could cut costs by moving their massive books to a digital format. A conference official justified the last minute action stating, “reporters and sports information directors were not ready to eschew the printed word for CD-ROMs and Websites” (Greenstein, 2004).

However, NCAA proposal 03-32 is still out there. It would prohibit distribution of printed media guides to recruits, and allegedly end the ‘arms race’ that has resulted in some football guides doubling in size in the last six years. Greenstein listed these guide statistics: Purdue’s football guide ballooned from 188 pages in 1997 to 396 last year. Michigan has multiplied to 424 pages while Texas’ remains the king of the jungle, checking in at 592 pages.

The SSU staff weighed in on the paper vs. electronic issue. The veterans espoused paper. The youngsters promoted bits and bytes. This conflict was one of the major tensions in the culture of the SID office.

George, who as I mentioned heavily resisted the move toward the ‘Communication Age’, admits that the electronic world will take over soon:

I think we’re headed toward paperless media guides. It’s only a matter of time. I’m still not sure about the media guides because of the value of the guides as a coffee table book, or for handing it to a recruit.

Paper at games hasn’t changed much, but I just put in a purchase order today for 12 remote computer monitors for football and basketball games. Now, we’ll have a monitor at every table for football and basketball games, so that now, we won’t be running around every time out handing out paper sheets. I still think the writers want those sheets in their hands.

Jack believes in killing trees:

I’m a paper guy; I’m a folder guy. I don’t know anything about computers.

Media guides are recruiting books. I don’t think you can eliminate printed media guides. However, that possibility is close. That’s on the table in our conference. I’m a paper guy. I kill trees (laughs).

Arnie checks in on the plus side for paper, and presents the prediction of the demise of newspapers as evidence media guides aren’t leaving anytime soon:

Awhile back they said the Internet would make newspapers go away. People still like to read the newspaper. I still read the newspaper. I don't like to go online to read the paper. You look forward to August 1<sup>st</sup> to get the football magazines, or the football guide from Vanderbilt to see what they've done. I was surprised by who proposed that universities do away with media guides. One of the big schools with plenty of money proposed it. I thought it was one of the small schools that were trying to keep up with the big boys. I'm kind of against it to be honest.

John saw the paper vs. computer debate from a middle ground:

I think it can change, but I think people don't want it to happen. We have to type it anyway, so it won't make a difference on our end. But, the media would have to print it out on their own and we'd get a lot of complaints. We put the media guides online anyway. It's already there. All you're doing is cutting out the print portion.

Sometimes you feel like even the football media guide doesn't get used that much. Writers still ask you questions and it's right there in front of them.

Some schools' media guides are like phone books. They are so big. Some schools feel like they have to compete with that.

I loved Scott, the GA's, comments in support of paper:

I don't think you'll ever get rid of printed media guides. What happens, with say a Heisman trophy ceremony, and you save it on Beta format. It's obsolete. Who's got Beta anymore? Twenty years from now, PDF's will be obsolete too. You won't be able to access it. Paper is always going to be there. It validates your records.

I think the paper culture is still here. Some writers barely have email. He's not going to go online. If they need something, they flip to the media guide. If he can't find it, he's going to give you a call. I think you still need to have some historical reference in the media guide. You can't rely on computers all the time. You still need paper. That's why we still print out our releases. On the road, the media guide is your office to look up something. If I'm out at tennis, I've got a laptop, but I can't access the Internet. You could put the media guide on PDF files, and still access them, but what if your battery's dead. The guide still has to be there.

It would be tough on a writer if there were not a printed media guide. The notion of getting rid of guides is ridiculous ... it's preposterous. Say I'm a TV reporter; you're not going a game with a computer. You've got enough crap with a tripod and a camera. He's not bringing a laptop to a football or basketball game. He's not going to throw a CD in a computer. You have to have game notes and a media guide.

Plus, I can't imagine the cost of going entirely wireless. Unless you've got every spot on football press row is wired with a touch monitor to pull up the media guide; that's the only way you could do it. I just don't see this happening any time soon.

Stan, the office's computer guru, was strong in his believe that paper is gone. He only says it's hung around because of old school SID's. He too contradicted his own beliefs in the computer by stating he likes to "get a hold of a guide":

Paper is going away, but it's still here because the people who are running the offices are veterans who have a hard time letting go. There's still some distrust among the veterans in not having the paper in a folder. I do like the idea of a printed media guide though. We've put them on the Internet for three years now anyway.

A lot of switching to archiving everything electronically is happening. I have no problem having everything on CD's. It takes up less space, and there are people at CoSIDA who are selling the systems for data backup. Paper will definitely become a thing of the past.

Another thing that's happen through CoSIDA is putting media guides on E books. I can't remember what school it was, but they put their whole basketball season on E books. They bought the E books and gave them to the media for the season. Then, all they had to do was download the information and it was like an ever-evolving media guide. All stats and the bio pages would be updated automatically. Even if they just got to the basketball court, they would download the information and have everything current. That's something that might happen soon.

These E books are pretty straightforward. They have a headshot and bullet point information only. The design is minimized and I really like the design because that's creativity to me. It's the old battle about how the information is presented. You're probably not going to see the paper culture go away at football games. It's still easier when you're writing a game story that night to be able to flip through the game stats book to see the stats right away. It's faster than going through your computer and doing downloads. But, there are so many things you can do on the computer to eliminate paper. You can FAX, or do PDF's, When I'm on the road, I don't even bring a printer anymore. I just FAX a PDF to the online file. PDF's have changed everything. You can have that document looking exactly like it looks on paper, but yet, it's on a computer file. PDF can hold the style and have letterhead and typefaces, so you have the same thing electronically.

Lisa, the young GA who is a Computer Age woman, also said paper was history:

I've grown up on the email culture and I think eventually the paper in this business will be gone. I grew up writing stories out on paper, before you wrote them on the computer. I think some people might still do this.

I think SID's will be the last to get to the paperless culture because of the media guides. How many years did it take to get things onto computer or the laptop? With remote technology, this is speeding up the move to get rid of media guides.

Another paper security blanket Marie, Jack and Scott clung to was the binders/folders they use to file the collection of paper artifacts they produce during the year. They admitted they were reluctant to give up their binders for electronic archiving. Marie said:

It's funny, in my binder for basketball, I still print out the stories and put them in the binder after I put the story on the website. I don't know why I do that. Maybe this will be my last year for a binder.

Marie was also the only member on the staff who brought up a major problem the SID offices through the accumulation of a war chest of paper ... where to put it all. She posed this suggestion to me:

We need to hire an archivist before we move to the new building and get this mess cleaned up. I'm not going to do it, George shouldn't have to do it, or Arnie, so we should hire a professional who wants to do it and gets paid to do it. I don't want somebody to call up and wonder about a tennis statistic and I can't find it. We need to find somebody for a few thousand dollars a month; it is greatly needed. However, it's probably only my idea, and it won't go any further than that.

### Laboring in Anonymity

Adding fuel to the scholarly debate over the status of the sports information director as either communications professional or technician is the blunt fact the staff at SSU labors in virtual anonymity. With the notable exception of home events, the SID's are immersed in a solitary environment within the walls either their office or cubicle with the personal computer as their primary companion and work implement. The computer for the SID can easily be compared to the hammer of the carpenter. It is a mere tool the technician uses to complete their task. Even at home events, the SID arrives early, sets up the press box before anyone arrives, and then steps aside into the background as the media and other users of the press box for home games enters. During home contests, they remain in shadows, lending a supporting, technician-like role to the conduct of the games. At the conclusion of home football games when everyone else is gone, the SID remains to the last writing up the story for the website, or beginning to formulate notes for next week's game. Friends of the SID's even ask them what they actually do at games, and for a living for that matter. My observations of the daily work schedule of the SID's and the drastic anonymity they toiled in allowed to me support McCleneghan's (2000) contention that SID's are perceived as and treated like communications technicians.

I have presented the idea that a major component of the culture of the SID office is the production of communication artifacts. This culture manifests itself in the creation of a homogeneous product where the writers, designers and creators are in essence anonymous, and one could argue, meaningless to the process of production. Marie admitted that she had to blend seven writing styles together into

one consistent format to produce the football media guide. This blending fosters a generic writing style that suppresses artistic creation in the majority of artifacts. The name of the SID who wrote every football biographical sketch is not mentioned ... the individual who spent days updating the records section is unlisted ... and, the SID who labored for months generating yet another massive football book is a virtual unknown in the world of Southeastern State University athletics. Nameless, faceless people spent countless days, weeks and months at a keyboard producing a highly anticipated artifact that thousands clamor for each August when the printed version is delivered. Yet, credit for this astonishing piece of journalistic work is limited to a 1-inch square box on page one of the guide. Virtual anonymity.

Human creativity begs for recognition, and sports information directors are no different. George admitted to me that the athletic administration ignores his staff and has no plans to provide pay raises or better recognition of the staff. This finding is consistent with McCleneghan's (2000) notion that athletic directors do not respect the SID as part of upper management staff. During my study, George said the athletic director had turned down the staff for pay raises, which added to the lack of recognition and anonymous status of the SID. George does his best to provide his staff with the requisite 'pats on the back,' but some staffers mentioned those were few and gestures like parties and other stress relievers he used to provide "don't happen anymore."

The creative efforts on the part of the SID's in the production culture are manifested in ways I observed during the study. The dramatic pressure to meet deadlines, the stress of dealing with an ever-increasing media presence, the unyielding demands of coaches and their own internal tensions to perform at the utmost, make this a formula for insanity. Anonymity is a major part of being an SID. Is this antithetical to the craft of being a writer? The SID's themselves commented they are servants to the media, coaches and staff, and I would conjecture that this production mentality does lead to other manifestations. The lack of human recognition, in support of Maslow's ideals of human needs, is lacking in the SID office. Anger and frustrations with George's leadership, cynicism, sarcastic

comments and negative behavior, and eventually, dejection, burnout and turnover in the office are all part of the reality of this culture of anonymity.

In summary, the shift toward a paperless SID office is coming whether George and veterans like it or not. Media guides cost NCAA Division I-A programs over a hundred thousand dollars a year to print according to the SSU SID office. This does not include vast amount of staff time designing, laying out, editing and finalizing a book. So, a movement toward the so-called 'E books' as Stan called them, is a rising reality. SID artifacts give a clear portrait of the production industry inside the SID culture. It shows they spend a majority of their workday behind a computer producing both printed and electronic objects. By observing the production of the books, understanding what they are created for and then analyzing the effect on the SID's, I was able to conclude that the generation of written press releases, media guides, game programs and the subsequent distribution of these items on the Internet, has come to define the culture of the SID. The culture of the SID office is product based rather than on the actual process of creating the artifacts.

A fundamental element the SID's face each day is the culture of anonymity they labor under. Unrecognized, unrewarded, and perhaps unnecessary as individuals because of the homogeneous writing the SID culture has created, sports information directors are a unique group of individuals who are devoted to the production culture while sacrificing the majority of any human recognition or distinction for their efforts. They labor to produce a myriad of printed and electronic artifacts; yet, in this culture of mass production, is it necessary to have an SID? Why don't we simply hire freelance writers and have them email it in?



## CHAPTER 9

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The stated purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the culture inside the sports information office at Southeastern State University, a NCAA Division I-A football-playing institution. Culture as defined by Spradley (1980) is the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior. Goodenough (1971, p. 21-22) called culture a collection of behavior patterns and beliefs that constitutes “standards for deciding what is, standards for deciding what can be, standards for deciding how one feels about it, standards for deciding what to do about it, and standards for deciding how to go about doing it.”

It must be clarified that I have studied a specific organizational culture during the dissertation. Schein (1993) defines culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. The idea of organizational culture manifests itself simultaneously through artifacts, values and assumptions. Schein (1985) noted that on the surface are *artifacts*; underneath those are *basic assumptions*, which represent human beliefs about reality and human nature that are taken for granted or accepted without proof; and further embedded in culture are *values*, which are social beliefs, philosophies, goals, and standards considered to have intricate worth. Schein claimed that basic assumptions hold the key to understanding or changing a culture. Over time and through the repetition of a pattern, the manner of behavior becomes accepted. Group members seek cognitive

stability and if people are treated consistently in terms of certain basic assumptions, they come eventually to behave according to those assumptions in order to make their world stable and predictable (Schein, 1985). I observed this view of organizational culture to be true in the culture of the sports information director. The group came to assume that basic communication behaviors like the 'Over the Wall,' 'Drive By's, the 'Talk vs. the Turn' and the acceptance of long hours laboring in anonymity, to be the norm in the culture of communication. Schein (1985) noted that an outside observer brings their own baggage to the group. I did bring my own bias to the study, and to an outside observer, some of the communicative norms the SID's practiced would seem to be cultural oddities. But, these unusual (as defined by the observer) communication practices became assumptions, and therefore, became part of the culture of communication.

Throughout the study, I have framed all observations and analysis of the culture of sports information with three fundamental aspects of the human experience: What people do, what people know, and the things people make and use. When members of a group share these, we speak of them as *cultural behavior, cultural knowledge, and cultural artifacts*.

Sands (2002, p. 150) argued, "sport reflects culture and culture reflects sport," and that sport has become a dominant part of contemporary human society. He posited, "sport is pervasive and never ceasing, casting giant shadows on other facets of life. For a culture, a world to go crazy over a ball game, a camel race, a lacrosse match, a run, speaks volumes about human behavior" (p. 150). He also surmised that sport has become a major part of modern culture when examined through a social, political or economical lens.

The overwhelming influence sport has on our modern culture and the impact SID's have on the culture of communication in athletics stimulated a scholarly interest that continually drove me through the course of this dissertation. My goal was to observe how the SID's communicated on a daily basis, how they shared different communicative behaviors, catalogue what they produced and synthesize all this data into an amalgamation known as the culture of sports information.

To crack the cultural 'code' of sports information, I implemented an ethnography of communication methodology to search for answers to the nature of this unique athletics sub-culture. A naturalistic, or 'discovery oriented' phenomenological inquiry, where the research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest (Dobbert, 1982, Guba, 1978, Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), is the methodological approach chosen for this study. Geertz' (1973) concept of 'going native' and providing 'thick description' of the observed group is central to the study of the SID's. They will be observed in their natural work environment and the intentions, motives, beliefs, rules, and values of the group will be observed. Denzin (1978) noted that the primary goal of naturalism is to capture the culture from within and understand it. By living close to the culture, the outside observer can acquire a certain objectivity to better interpret the behaviors of the group. The existence of specific communicative cultural patterns within the SID office will be the outcome of the research.

Five primary keys were identified to discover the culture of communication in the SID office. They include: 1) Identify the community (SID staff), 2) Observe specific communicative events, 3) Recognize and identify event components, 4) Identify relationships between group members, and 5) Develop a clear understanding of how these events coordinate together to identify SID culture.

The methodology utilized in this study was centered on an heuristic approach, where my 22 years of experience in college sports information played a major role in framing the observations and analysis of the SSU SID's. An ethnography of communication, which is a specialized type of qualitative research where ethnographic methods are applied to the communication patterns of a group, was used to collect field notes and interview transcriptions during the study.

The primary research tools I employed were an extensive collection of field notes from my daily observations of the staff at work and at athletic events, transcripts of audio recordings from open-ended interviews, reviews of SID artifacts and documents and the observation of other methods of communication used by the sports information staff.

After completing the observations of the staff, I did a preliminary analysis of the observational field notes, and five dominant themes emerged from the notes. They included: 1) office space, 2) verbal communication, 3) electronic communication, 4) non-verbal communication, and 5) artifacts and rituals. These will be discussed in detail in the next section. The field notes were then color coded with five different colors of highlighters and colored Post-it notes to categorize them into the five themes during the writing of the final thematic chapters. Additionally, using the five communication themes as a foundation, an interview schedule was produced (see Appendix A) to use during SID staff interviews. Questions were developed to help confirm and explain the cultural themes and sub-topics I observed during the participant observation phase.

Through a longitudinal examination of the behaviors of the SSU sports information staff, their daily communicative interactions, both interpersonal and technological, combined with an assessment of the knowledge they possess and how they acquire it from each other, and a complete appraisal of the rituals they engage in and the artifacts they produce, should reveal a clear picture of the culture of the SID office.

### Office Space

Office space was a defining factor in identifying the culture of communication in the SID office. The physical distance between George's office, the full-time assistants and the graduate assistants on the other end of the press box, in my opinion, created a culture of separation. These three distinct areas of the SSU press box became zones of demarcation between the superior (George), the full-time assistants and the graduate assistants. An anti-hierarchy culture was fostered by the space problems in this study. Not only did the real space between the offices generate separateness, it also fostered real communications breakdowns. As I observed in the study, the SID staff at Southeastern State University will move into a new building during the coming year with a vastly different office space scenario. A follow-up ethnographic study utilizing the already identified

communication patterns will be necessary to confirm if the SID's communicate differently in a new spatial environment.

### Verbal Communication

As I mentioned in the chapter on verbal communication, this study was nearly cancelled due to a communications problem in the SID office. So, from the onset of the observations, I made a point to observe if this pattern of slow responses to phone calls, requests and other demands by the SID staff could be identified as a norm of this culture.

The 'over the wall' system of verbal communication was a key finding of the study. This was highly popular with the full time assistants because of the close proximity of their offices (the back-to-back location of the low, portable walls). Rather than get up and walk five feet, each staff member would repeatedly holler over the wall of the cubicle to the next person. The over the wall style was consistently used by the SID's during the entire duration of the study. The graduate assistants in the kitchen area also used this communication method as a small portable wall separated them. They were unable to see each other in a direct line of sight. Additionally, George and Betsy, his secretary, employed this unorthodox style for quick requests to each other for needed information.

I can state that the 'over the wall' communications created a culture of connectedness between the SID's. The staff was able to overcome the spatial problems of the office by using this communications technique. Since verbal communications is one of the primary modes of interpersonal communication in the sports information office, this finding became a central finding from the observations.

I was also intrigued by the fact the SID's did not spend more time with face-to-face communication. The SID's explained this away by saying the fast pace and deadline driven nature of the business made this form a necessity to make progress on job tasks.

Another component of the verbal communication culture I found was the use of 'drive by meetings.' This method was identified as being comparable to 'over the wall' communications by the staff for the same reasons -- the hurried pace, the vast

job load and the pressures of deadlines. I would summarize that 'drive bys' are similar to the 'over the wall' discussions because of the maximization of interconnectedness between the individual groups during the day. The full-timers and the GA's favor this method it allows them to maintain a human element to their daily communications among themselves. My observations also showed that the 'drive bys' are also used as time saving devices by the staff, again owing to the rapid nature of the need to get questions answered in a hurry so they can move on to the next job task. Once again, the office space issue and the physical distance between the office areas, contributed to this communications phenomenon.

A finding that most of the staff stated during the interviews was that the SID office could not, and probably will not ever be a normal business environment. That is, unless it becomes like Betsy observed, a newspaper newsroom. The Southeastern SID office clearly is an informal business climate, where the tone of voice is relaxed, yet subdued. During my observations, I witnessed numerous examples of discussions and impromptu meetings that were carried on in the hallway, in each other's offices, or at staff meetings, where the tone was informal. Yet, I always maintained a gnawing wonder whether this casualness was genuine

A culture of surveillance was identified through my observations of George. He mentioned he used the 'drive by' meeting for this purpose. He said, "I want them to think I'm not checking up on them, but I am checking up on them." The scenario of the casual, relaxed office environment was repeatedly mentioned, but the observations show otherwise. George clearly states that he walks by to see what the staff is up to. This was a practice that was upsetting to the staff as in the interviews they saw George's 'management by walking around' style as intrusive and distracting, and a culture of avoidance was created due to his surveillance style.

Having worked in several SID offices in the past, I was always intrigued by the casual, informal nature that seemed almost a presupposed "given" in the sports information culture. The months of observation in the SID office confirmed this hypothesis. The staff described the atmosphere as relaxed, and highly informal, yet was businesslike in the sense that a lot of work was being accomplished. Communications in this office environment were mostly casual, and yet subdued.

This is mostly contextual due to the rushed nature of communication within the office.

The repeated use of humor indicated two primary conclusions about SID culture: 1) First, humor was almost unanimously described as a stress buster by the entire staff; and 2) humor was revealed as an anti-hierarchy device; and 3) a disjointed haphazard degeneration of the communication lines at the end of staff meetings indicated communication problems. Despite George's efforts to maintain a level of connection between himself and the staff, the simple fact that the staff makes fun of him, or utilizes them as the brunt of their jokes (about his lagging computer skills), shows they have some disdain for him as superior.

Laughter was present, but it was clearly not a constant. George's mention of 'there being a danger in having it like that' may be a reminder that the danger is real for him and the interpersonal relationship with his staff.

Confirmation of the culture of avoidance and separation was shown by the dramatic lack of formal meetings between the staff. The only scheduled group gathering for the staff is the weekly SID staff meeting. Observations during these meetings revealed several findings about the group's culture of communication. Seating during every meeting was arranged hierarchically. Marie, the SID responsible for the office's day-to-day operations, sat in front next to George's desk, as did Arnie, who is responsible for football, SSU's most important sport. The rest of the staff fanned out in a second row behind those two, with the GA's striving to get as far away from George as possible. The anti-hierarchy theme manifested itself at every staff meeting.

One point I picked up on was a lack of conflict during all the staff meetings. The staff interviews clearly confirmed a significant amount of conflict in the office related to my anti-hierarchy discovery. This allows me to conclude that a culture of avoidance most certainly exists in this office. Despite George's attempts to keep an open mind and an open door, the staff for the most part avoided any conflict with their superior. Conflicts between George and Marie and other staffers were settled only behind closed doors, unobserved by me. Second, the anti-hierarchy seating arrangement engaged in by the staff was revealing. Those on the higher strata of

the organizational hierarchy in the office sat near George's desk, while those on the opposite end, chose seats farther away. Third, the consistency with which the meetings degenerated into wide-open free for alls at the end was noteworthy. This confirmed the sporadic, disjointed nature of the communication culture in the office, and is directly related to the over the wall and drive by modes already identified.

Nowhere in the study is there stronger evidence to support a paradigmatic shift in the culture of sports information than in my discovery of the telephone versus the personal computer as the primary communications device at SSU. The 'old school' pitted against 'new school' SID's debate clearly fell along the lines of the veteran SID's who were trained to use the telephone first to communicate, with the younger staff members who were raised in a computer first generation. The culture of electronic communication in the SID office will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter. I did find that the overuse of the computer to communicate has clearly cost the SSU staff some ground in maintaining good interpersonal relationships with each other.

A central theme that defines the culture of communication at SSU is George's admission that he does not like conflict with other individuals in the office. I found that he avoids conflict at all costs. He would prefer to let something fester and see if the people can solve the problem themselves before he has to take action. This lack of desire to make tough personnel decisions (and communicate his decisions directly) was well documented in the interviews and was repeatedly mentioned as the primary cause of unrest and conflict in the office. George's perspective offers one side of the issue of managing a diverse, highly creative staff, that by nature of the job, must work independently and make individual decisions without benefit of a direct supervisor much of the time.

Two primary tensions were made clear: 1) George's reluctance to break his long-standing love affair with the basic job task of the SID -- handling a sport in favor of becoming solely the office's superior, has resulted in frustration and tension for the staff; and 2) George's strong avoidance of interpersonal conflict is a major issue threatening the balance of the office's communication culture. Directly related to his refusal to give up direct contact with a sport, this management issue beats at the



heart of the office's culture. It can be concluded that his self-admitted avoidance of conflict severely diminishes the morale of the entire staff. By avoiding conflict and refusing to deal with the daily work related issues, George has driven a wedge into the center of the office's communications culture. Subordinates look to their superior to make hard decisions and to act as the manager of the office. In this work environment, the lack of a consistent pattern of management, and subsequent lack communication of expectations and requirements, has furthered the culture of separateness.

### Electronic Communication

Lull (2002) believes that electronic communication has become an ever-powerful influence in the shaping of the culture of communication; that the efficient transmission of digitized bits and bytes has radically changed the way we communicate. Yet, he also believes that despite the increased usage of the computer, the manner in which we shape our communications behaviors remains the same. Through my ethnography of communication conducted in the SSU SID office, I can conclude that in this sporting context, information technology has become a dominant mode of human communication.

The confirmation of the PC as the central communications device in the SID office is one of the foundational findings of this study. However, despite the PC's widespread use, there were those SID's who disdained this paradigmatic change in sports information's basic communications culture. The battle lines of this cultural struggle raged along the lines of "old school" SID's, or those who remained loyal to verbal communication, either face-to-face or via the telephone, deployed against those "new school" individuals, a younger, more computer-hip generation who believed in almighty PC as the number one way to communicate.

The old school, new school dyad is divided on whether the telephone or the computer is the preferable communications device for SID's. The old school staff members were trained during an era when public relations specialists were taught that one-on-one interpersonal communication was the most essential element in good media relations. Their primary tool of choice is the telephone. However, the

new school members clearly eschewed the phone in favor of the PC. I would suggest this as a major cultural change in the sports information profession because the fundamental nature of communications has evolved away from interpersonal human interactions, to one of an impersonal message on a computer screen.

My study clearly found that electronic technological methods have become the primary modes by which the sports information office at Southeastern State communicates not only with each other, but also with their external constituents. My observations revealed a major reduction of the use of the telephone by staff members to ask questions, or request information from the other groups. Despite this clear conclusion born out by the field observations and personal interviews, the 'old school – new school' debate over whether the computer is superior to the telephone as a communications device, rages at SSU. This powerful change in communications culture is very evident at Southeastern State.

Second, the debate over the use of email to communicate with the media, and with other in the office is also a widely argued concern for the SID staff. This issue is also aligned with the veteran SID's taking an opposite position from the newer members. The vets denounced its use, while Generations X and Y claimed it provides a powerful weapon in the battle for media attention.

I would pose that the dramatic use of technology has strengthened the culture of avoidance between the SID's. Email allows the SID to hide behind the computer, rather than have to communicate interpersonally with other humans. The passive nature of the computer allows a timid, or lazy SID to simply click 'send,' and be done with the communications effort. This finding directly correlates with McCroskey and Richmond's (1982) four-trait scale of communications personalities – the Shyness Personality Trait, the Willingness to Communicate Trait, Assertiveness-Responsive Personality Trait and the Compulsive Personality Trait. The old school members of the office would be aligned with the Willingness to Communicate Trait; members that are aggressive in their communication style. By contrast, the new school members could be seen as having the Shyness Personality Trait, or the concept of shyness, where members avoid communication. Therefore, a culture of avoidance is a major component in the communication world of the SID office.

### Non-Verbal Communication

Two major non-verbal communication findings emerged from the study. The discovery of a technique I described as '*talk vs. the turn*', and the use of body language, facial expressions and eye contact to communicate in specific office situations and during home football games, were the major findings. The '*talk vs. the turn*' became a centerpiece element in the culture of sports information. I again use the framework of the high stress and deadline pressurized world of the SID office as the reason for the use of this non-verbal technique.

Every member of the SID staff used the '*talk vs. the turn*' during the study, not only with me, but also with each other. The '*talk*' occurred when the staff member did not feel like communicating and sent a strong non-verbal message to the interloper to "not bother me right now." The '*turn*' was used when the individual was in a more relaxed, communicative mode and would literally turn their entire body toward the questioner to begin a normal human interaction. These two particular terms helped me confirm again that the SID's communicate on the fly more than I had originally believed. The machine gun communications style, as I pointed out in the verbal section through the use of '*over the wall*' and '*drive by meetings*' are directly related to the '*talk vs. the turn*'. They are communicative concepts that are used by individuals grasp at various communicative styles to complete their job without losing a communications link to their fellow office mates. However, I also can conclude that these techniques were used to avoid interpersonal communication at times. The SID's hide behind the computer, but they also avoid human communication by sending this negative non-verbal body message.

My observations of body language, hand gestures, eye contact, and other non-verbal communication expressions in the office were most recorded during staff meetings and home football games. The subliminal anti-hierarchical culture in the SID office was evident, but it was not a dominant element. What primarily came through for me in observing the SID's and their non-verbal communication, was that a tremendous amount of pressure and tension are on the SID's during their work day and despite their efforts to conceal it, their body language gave away their feelings

and emotions. Two scenarios I observed that provided the most evidence of other types of non-verbal communications were during staff meetings and at home football games.

The body language displayed by the staff during meetings betrayed George's attempt to maintain an informal atmosphere in the SSU SID office. I have referred frequently to the culture of connectivity that George has worked hard to invoke as his management style. His casual style during the meetings filled with jokes and a light tone were imposed to lighten the stress in the office. However, the lack of a more formal structure for the meetings became a detractor that generated a mild anti-hierarchical culture. The hierarchical seating arrangement I described in a previous chapter became significant because it also confirmed the hierarchy in the office and the culture of separation between George and the rest of the staff.

I clearly observed that the ritual of the home football game was as close to a regular, consistent routine the SID staff exercised during my entire study. I will point out that the occurrences shown in the following description of the press box during a home game week were followed almost exactly during the five home game weeks. The only differentiation from this routine came when the game was on national television, or the game was a major rivalry contest:

### Rituals

Two predominant rituals materialized from the analysis of the field notes and interviews transcriptions. The first was the conduct of the SID's during SSU's five high holidays – home football games, and the other was the presence and consumption of food in the press box during home games. The ritual of the home football game fostered a different type of communication between the SID's. The lack of a written plan to prepare for the staff for hosting over 300 media personnel five times on Saturday during the fall led to my conclusion that the communication between the SID staff during the game had indeed become ritual – passed down from superiors and more experienced SID's to the subordinates through the use of oral tradition.

The atmosphere in the football press box during the High Holiday allowed me to observe the SID's physical demeanor and body language, urgency of foot speed, concentration in the eyes and the more rapid methods of communicating both verbally and non-verbally. The excitement and tensions of the game where the staff must service over 300 media members, including a national television broadcast, points to a high stress communications scenario. The staff must be prepared for any situation and be ready to respond immediately. Betsy mentioned in her interview that the stress level increased as the game drew closer, but the excitement level increased exponentially as well. A poignant example was George's statement: If I could take a picture of them at kickoff (SID staff), their faces would match that of the players on the field.

Home football games are a ritual not only for college football fans, but for the SID staff as well. As the definition states, a ritual is a faithfully followed condition characterized by the presence of established procedure or routine. The key words faithfully followed and routine define a key component of SID culture at SSU. The oral tradition in preparing the staff for the game, the excitement and subsequent tension that builds up as the game approaches, and the heightened tension during the actual contest are all key components that add to the communicative culture of the sports information director.

The other ritual observed during the study was that of the serving of food in the press box. I include food as ritual during home games because of the social value importance. Some in the SID profession believe that the media does not need to be fed at home games. I would argue that food, a basic component of human sustenance and social interaction, helps generate a huge amount of positive public relations for the institution. During my observations, I too ate the excellent food in the Huffnagle Stadium press box along with hundreds of other people. I noticed that many individuals would go back through the line multiple times, would hit the soda machines frequently during the game and the popcorn and peanuts that were put out at halftime, quickly disappeared and were even hoarded by some writers. Sports information culture was enhanced because the staff was able to interact with each

other and the news media over a delicious well-planned meal. The ritual is one that is repeated for every home game and anticipated by all who work in the press box.

The transient, minute-by-minute nature of the sports information office prevents the sports information office from developing many rituals. George mentioned that he rarely gets completes a normal workday because things change quickly rapidly in the SID business. Because this lack of a normal work routine existed in the SID offices, I cannot conclusively say I observed any other specific SID rituals during the study period.

### Artifacts

In chapter 8, I defined artifacts as those objects produced or shaped by human craft, especially those of archaeological or historical interest (Pickett, 2002). The sports information staff spends the majority of its work day (and nights) producing several different types of artifacts – mostly of the printed kind. Press passes, press releases, media guides and game programs, and electronic website documents are the artifacts that consume the SID staff's time. A culture of production, both printed and electronic, is highly evident in this group of sport communicators.

A dramatic finding of the study was the discovery of the importance of Press Passes as a cultural icon in the SID office. The interview with George demonstrated SSU spends \$6,500 to print press passes for five home games. I feel they go to such extravagant lengths because the passes represent a power mechanism that allows them to control the access and the hierarchy of the press box environment.

Press Releases are the most frequently produced artifact of the sports information staff. The majority of SSU's press releases are disseminated via email and on the department's website due to George also bemoaned the cultural change in the nature of press releases due to the culture of immediacy fostered by the Internet. The study found that the printed press release was all but gone in the sports information office. Media Guides and Game Programs are artifacts where the creativity, resourcefulness and true production skills of the SID staff are displayed. They spend vast quantities of time, (sitting at the computer), doing layout, updating

previous year's statistics, biographical sketches, research, and the most important, time-consuming task -- writing. When the printed guides and programs are delivered, hundreds of hours of staff time are imbedded in the books. These modern day printed behemoths represent a crucial arms race in college athletics related to who can make the biggest media guide. The Department Website is arguably the most important artifact of today's modern SID office. I have previously mentioned the culture of electronic communication that exists in the SID office. I observed the extensive use of website to disseminate releases, photos, feature stories, schedules, statistics, and media guides for viewing by the entire sports world during the study. I found that accessibility and immediacy are now the buzzwords for the SID business.

Several staff members mentioned during the interviews that SID's serve as the archivists and historians for the intercollegiate athletic program. Preserving the past had great value to the SSU SID staff, but the method -- whether printed artifacts or electronic data discs -- once again exposed the separation of ideology between the veterans and younger SID's.

In summary, the SID staff works extremely hard to produce the various artifacts required to adequately perform the function as an SID. The artifacts help disseminate information promote Southeastern State University to media, boosters, students, faculty and other internal and external constituents. The culture of production is reinforced by tight deadlines imposed by the athletic administration, by George and the sport coaches. Yet, an underlying apprehension I would pose is the vast measure of anonymity the sports information director labors under working in the industry of production. Marie admitted it would be impossible to tell how many press releases, practice game notes, post-season media guides, game advances, countless feature stories, and other routine press information the SSU staff produces during the year. The hours required to produce that amount of documentation is incalculable. Yet, despite the vast industry of cranking out this phenomenal volume of material, it is even more impossible to tell who wrote the majority of it. Except for the writer's name on the receipt line of an email to the hack's list, and a mention on the first few pages of media guides, the staff's vast industry in writing and design goes virtually unnoticed. This is a wellspring of concern for SID's because the

manifestations of the subsequent pressures, stressors, and lack of acknowledgement are evidenced by anti-hierarchy tensions, interpersonal conflict, and other tensions and frustration identified in the SID literature like burnout, health concerns, job turnover and a great lack of respect for the sports information profession.

To conclude this dissertation, I must acknowledge that this ethnographic study represents only a slice of the culture of the sports information office. Its sole purpose was to examine the methods and patterns the sports information staff at SSU use to communicate with each other, and thereby discover more about the culture of communication inside this group. My goal throughout is to pull those slices together into a comprehensive look at the communicative world inside the sports information office. I have presented the verbal, non-verbal and electronic modes of communication between the SID's, and evaluated the rituals they engage in and the staggering amount of artifacts this resourceful group of individuals produces during the academic year.

Several manifestations such as the culture of separateness that closely parallels the display of anti-hierarchical behavior among the staff were discovered. A culture of connectedness was found among the staff, but it existed at the cost of human-to-human interpersonal contact. The fast-paced, immediate demand atmosphere of the SID offices forced the creation of time saving communication devices such as over the wall communication, drive-by meetings, or sending an email 10 feet rather than speaking to the person. These devices, along with the vast reliance on electronic communication, showed me that the SID staff possesses a strong work ethic to produce the extraordinary amount of artifacts inherent in the sports publicity profession. The SID's rarely work a normal 40-hour week, subsist under enormous pressure, and everything they produce is under scrutiny by anyone able to access the World Wide Web. Yet, they toil in near virtual anonymity, and the tensions and conflicts that appeared in the study were a foreboding sign of potential problems in the future.

This dissertation was a labor of love for me as a former sports information director. I was able to investigate SID's on an intense personal basis to find out



more about the process of communication between the key communication specialists in college athletics. Through the ethnographic process, I discovered a wealth of information to help me better define the culture of sports communication. The information came from them all -- from George, who ultimately gave me unrestrained access to the office and its functions, to Betsy, whose insight and friendship made access to important information easier, the four full-time staff members who provided honesty and openness throughout, down to the three graduate assistants who gave me a different perspective on how newcomers to the SID profession perceive the business. The study's intention is that through a better understanding of the communication culture of the SID office, SID's will be able to interact better with each other internally, communicate better with other SID's and the media, and to eventually expand that knowledge so that athletic administrators will understand the value the SID brings to intercollegiate athletics.

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Schedule

As a preface, the interviewer will explain the study's purpose to the subject:

1) to discover the culture of communication in the SID office; 2) to explore the communication patterns in the SID office; 3) and discover what artifacts, both written and electronic, are produced by the staff.

### Verbal Communication

1. I've noticed that there are a lot of impromptu discussions that occur outside your door. Does this happen often?
2. Tell me about the "over the wall" communication style I've observed.
3. Humor seems to be used in the office from time to time? Describe why you think it is used.
4. Does the use of humor among SID staff members help/hurt the rapport among the staff?
5. How often does the SID staff communicate/meet formally to exchange ideas?
6. Do you think the tone of most conversations in the SID office is informal or formal?
7. Are voices raised or lowered often to make a point?
8. What are the tensions, conflicts in the SID office? How often does your supervisor/superior get tough/demanding? How do they express their displeasure?

### Non-Verbal Communication

1. I've noticed the body language here in the SID office suggests an easygoing environment. Is this a correct assessment? Are there specific gestures that are commonly used in this office to communicate different things?
2. Does the SID's system of management by walking around help you in your work?

3. Is the physical presence of your supervisor seen as a threat or one of support?
4. Does the 'drive-by meeting' culture affect your work? Are they welcomed or are they too disruptive?
5. Talk about the space issues that influence the communication between staff members (proximity, distance apart, small offices).
6. Does the stress of the job make it hard to communicate with your superior? Your co-workers?
7. Is the stress level different for you at different times of the year? Describe what it's like at the toughest point in the athletic year.
8. Is privacy an issue for on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of the press box?
9. What is your relationship like with the Director? The Associate SID's, the Assistant SID's, the Graduate Assistants? The Secretary? The Student Interns?

#### Electronic Communication

1. There seems to a culture of the computer in the SID office? Do you use it as your primary communication device?
2. How important is it to you in performing your job tasks?
3. How much time do you spend on it each day?
4. What other electronic devices do you use to do your job?
5. Is email your primary communications device?
6. How important are the FAX machine, cellular telephones and walkie-talkies to the communications process of the SID office?

#### Artifacts

1. Does a 'Paper Culture' exist in the SID office?
2. Your boss has been quoted, as saying a shift to on-line media guides should be done. Is this possible?
3. Is there a shift toward a paperless sports information profession?

4. How important are media guides to the development of the culture of the SID?
5. I've observed that press passes to football games are very important? How important are these to the SID staff?
6. Discuss the differences in attire of the SID staff.
7. Should SID staff be dressed more formally during regular office hours?

### Rituals

1. I've noticed certain communication habits that occur here in the office. Describe some of these for me.
2. How does the SID staff communicate with each other on the high holiday known as football game day?
3. Are the job tasks for each staff member on football game day written down? How are they communicated to new staff members? What training procedures are in place to prepare for game day?
4. Are new public relations ideas generated in the office? Who stimulates these and who carries them out?
5. Are there any particular social rituals the SID staff goes through away from the job?
6. Each of the SID staff seems to have an extensive collection of memorabilia and mementos. Why does everyone have these in his or her office?
7. I've also noticed a large amount of other items that have accumulated in everyone's office. Does this relate to a lack of storage space? Or, is the clutter part of the culture of this office?
8. Does the SSU SID office have a written public relations plan in place?
9. Is there a written crisis management plan for the SID office? Is a member of the SID staff on the athletic department's crisis management team?



APPENDIX B

Office of the Vice President  
for Research  
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2763  
(850) 644-5260 • FAX (850) 644-4392

## APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

from the Human Subjects Committee

**Date:** October 15, 2003

**From:** David Quadagno, Chair *DQ*

**To:** *Frederick L. Battenfield*  
2404 Royal Oaks Drive  
Tallahassee, FL 32309

**Dept:** Sport Management, Recreation Management and Physical Education

**Re:** Use of Human subjects in Research

**Project entitled:** An Ethnographic Study of the Communication  
Patterns in the Sports Information Office at a NCAA Division 1-A  
Athletic Program

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The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Committee at its meeting on **October 8, 2003**. Your project was approved by the Committee.

**The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals which may be required.**

If the project has not been completed by **October 7, 2004**, you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

APPLICATION NO. 03.499  
Cc: A. Kent

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**  
**IRB # (03.499)**

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project entitled An Ethnographic Study of the Communication Patterns in the Sports Information Office at a NCAA Division I-A Athletic Program

Frederick L. Battenfield, who is a doctoral candidate at Florida State University, is conducting this research. I understand the purpose of his research project is to develop an understanding of the culture of intercollegiate athletics, more specifically the communication patterns, symbols and methods that are used by the sports information staff to perform their job responsibilities. I understand that if I participate in the project I will be asked questions about how communication occurs in the FSU athletic department, my feelings about the culture, job tasks and how communication practices are performed in relation to different constituencies served by the SID office.

I understand that the researcher will be a participant observer of the SID staff during normal office hours and at FSU athletic events. I also understand that he will be asking questions to clarify the methods I use to communicate with my colleagues and other staff members, student-athletes, the media and other groups I serve during my daily job tasks. I also understand that during the project, the researcher will interview me. The time frame of the study will be the duration of the fall, 2003 semester. The researcher will readily answer my questions during the project, or they will be referred to the researcher's major professor.

I understand my participation is totally voluntary and I may stop participation at anytime. All my answers to the questions will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law, and identified by a subject code number. My name will not appear on any of the results. No individual responses will be reported. Only group findings will be reported. I also understand that some interviews may be audio taped by the researcher, and the content of the recordings will also be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law.

Strict confidentiality of all field notes, interviews, and other observations will be maintained throughout the course of the study. Participants will be identified by a code name to maintain anonymity and no personal information will be divulged in the final report. All field notes, audio tapes, and other documents will be kept in a locked cabinet by the researcher, and will be kept until the year 2014 when they will be destroyed.

In order to insure the credibility and accuracy of the data collected during the study, the results will be triangulated; That is, transcriptions of field notes and audio recordings will be presented to the SID staff member to whom each section pertains. Staff members will only see interviews and notes that refer to them. This will insure that the information recorded by the researcher is accurate and reflects the viewpoint of the staff member interviewed. All of the data will be kept confidential from other SID staff members.

I understand there are benefits for participating in this research project. First, as a professional communicator, the outcome of the study may enhance how I communicate with my colleagues, other staff members, and the media and outside constituent groups interested in Florida State University Athletics.

I understand that this consent may be withdrawn at any time without prejudice, penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I have been given the right to ask and have answered any inquiry concerning the study. Questions, if any, have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may contact Dr. Aubrey Kent, Florida State University, School of Sport Management, Tully Gym, (850) 644-7174, or Fred Battenfield, (850) 906-9270, for answers to questions about this research or my rights. Group results will be sent to me upon my request.

I have read and understand this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Subject)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Witness)



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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Frederick L. Battenfield, a 22-year veteran of the sports information profession, left the ranks of intercollegiate athletics in 2000 to obtain his doctoral degree in sport management at Florida State University. He served as a teaching and research assistant while at FSU and his dissertation is entitled "An Ethnographic Study of the Culture of Communication in a NCAA Division I-A Sports Information Office."

Battenfield began his teaching career as an assistant professor at Old Dominion University in the Fall 2004. Prior to returning graduate school, Battenfield was assistant athletic director at Barry University in Miami Shores, Florida, and previously served as sports information director at Rollins College and The University of Texas at San Antonio. He also was assistant SID at Texas A&M University and The University of Texas at Austin.

He earned his Master's degree in Sport Administration at the United States Sports Academy, a Bachelor of Journalism degree from The University of Texas at Austin, and an Associate of Arts Degree at Yavapai (AZ) College.

A long-time volleyball enthusiast, his background included working at the 1996, 1988, and 1984 Summer Olympic Games volleyball competitions. He was the volleyball producer at the 1996 Games, press attaché for the USA volleyball teams in 1988 in Seoul, Korea and served as assistant press venue chief for volleyball in 1984 in Los Angeles. He is a former national volleyball referee, began the men's and women's college volleyball programs at the University of Texas at San Antonio as head coach, and was actively involved in many other volleyball pursuits.

In addition to the Olympics, Fred has participated in numerous national and international sporting events, including several U.S. Olympic Festivals, the NCAA Final Four and has been a television and radio commentator.

He is married to Catherine Hults Battenfield and the couple has two children, Julianna and Robby.