

# Leading the Flying V: The University of Oregon Shows How NCAA Women's Athletic Programs Can Go Do Anything

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## Abstract

"This research study aims to explore, utilizing qualitative research, the effectiveness of campaigns associated with women's athletics from the perspective of athletic department staff. The research problem is twofold: first, although there are numerous research studies on the gender inequality in media coverage in sports however, there are few studies that specifically focus on women's athletic program campaigns in the NCAA. Second, successful initiatives like the University of Oregon's Women in Flight program and 'Go Do Anything' campaign are not happening across the country, and there are no genuine answers as to why other NCAA athletic departments do not do something similar.

This study will be conducted through the lens of the Wedell-Wedellsborg (2020) reframing process which encourages researchers to look outside of traditional frames, re-think their goals, examine bright spots, and then look in the mirror to let go of past assumptions and narratives, which ensures outside perspectives are considered. The goal of this framework is to keep momentum and move forward. This study will use the foundation of Weddell-Wedellsborg, to change the research problem of the past (comparing media coverage of male versus female athletes), to make contributions towards the future (celebrate women's athletics and show growth). Weddell-Wedellsborg notes the statistic that eighty-five percent of companies have issues solving the right problems.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the current state of women's athletic program campaigns and identify the barriers faced by athletic departments in creating successful campaigns. The researchers will qualitatively explore the perspectives of various athletic department staff in four different colleges, including the University of Oregon, to attain a comprehensive understanding of women's athletic department campaigns. The interviews will be conducted using open-ended questions, followed by content analysis to identify common themes. The authors of this article support that while women's sport research has progressed, few studies have broken through to inform industry decision-making. Thus, it is necessary to expand research contributions to better support women athletes and women's athletics growth. During initial data collection, all power five NCAA universities were analyzed to determine if there were specific initiatives for women's athletics. The University of Oregon was chosen as the most successful campaign throughout the power five conferences, raising \$15 million dollars in one year.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the University of Oregon in 2023, with three additional NCAA institutions to follow in 2024. Results from the interview with the University of Oregon included athletic department buy-in, former student-athlete alumni participation and fan support as attributes crediting to the success of the campaign and Women in Flight program. Further, from a program perspective, monetary focus included scholarships, experience, team building, career development, team foreign tours and community events. Interestingly, there was no influence or monetary support to the Women in Flight program or Go Do Anything campaign from the University of Oregon's partnership with Nike.

Additional anticipated results from additional institutions will include barriers to promoting women's athletic programs specifically, as well as potential successes of other institutions."