

IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP STYLES AMONG WINNING COLLEGE HEAD  
FOOTBALL COACHES: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Liberty University

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to discover and interpret the successful leadership styles of winning college head football coaches (HFC) in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The theory that guided this study is Bass's (1995) transformational leadership theory. The central question asked, "What are the lived experiences of winning college HFCs leadership initiatives?" The study used a hermeneutic phenomenological design where HFCs participated in interviews and a focus group and submitted a writing prompt response to obtain the lived experiences about proven winning leadership styles. The study's findings identified sixteen themes and five sub-themes. The sample exhibited the ideology that their role as the primary leader is a crucial determinant for achieving winning success as a college football head coach.

*Keywords:* college, football, head coaches, transformational, leadership, NCAA

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### **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to all my future players and coaches who are guided under my leadership and all coaches seeking to provide ideal leadership for optimal athlete development.

To my parents, thank you for encouraging me to continue my education and pushing me to be my best version.

### **Acknowledgments**

I want to acknowledge Dr. Perry for initially helping shape my study and Dr. Howland for accompanying my research journey by chairing this study and becoming a mentor throughout this study. I also want to acknowledge all current college coaches for their time and dedication to student-athlete well-being and success. Lastly, I want to acknowledge all the participants who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in the study. Your insight into effective leadership is highly valued and will have a widespread influence.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

Academic Progress Rate (APR)

Division One (D1)

Division Two (D2)

Division Three (D3)

Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS)

Football Conference Subdivision (FCS)

Head Coach (HC)

Head Football Coach (HFC)

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

International Review Board (IRB)

Transformational Leadership (TL)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Leadership is an essential component of organizational outlook and is a primary facet used to manage sports (Cunningham et al., 2018). This chapter presents the historical, social, and theoretical context depicting the past and present relevance of the leadership of a head college football coach. The significance of the study and the problem statement portray the issue in college coaching that exemplifies the reasoning and vitality for research. The foundation for research conduction is led by the central and sub-research questions grounded on transformational leadership (TL) theory and the associated framework variables. This chapter presents essential research components that provide foundational approaches to seeking and understanding winning leadership strategies among successful college head football coaches (HFC) and depicts definitions to help explain primary keywords whose meanings can be misinterpreted. Determining HFC's leadership methods presents a valid perspective of leading a college football program framed by the TL theory presented by Bass (2015).

### **Background**

A college head football coach (HFC) is versatile, and the demand for dynamic head coaches continues to drive the coaching industry. College football head coaches are typically the highest-paid government employees in each state (Brook, 2021), and the leadership strategy significantly influences the achieved level of success (Macquet, 2021). The historical, social, and theoretical aspects regarding college head football coaches portray the nature of coaching college football while identifying the relevancy and affiliations of the leadership role. The role of a college HFC accompanies influence over many individuals, and the leadership environment that the head coach establishes significantly influences overall outcomes (Orr, 2019). The problem

statement focuses on institutional operations and standards for athletic conduct, presenting the HC with the responsibility to guide, develop, and prepare the coaching staff and student-athletes to operate with the intent of excellence (Holden et al., 2019). Following the theoretical concept, transformational leadership and various other leadership theories present the nature and essence of a college HFC. Transformational leadership theory involves aspiring team members presenting acceptable behavior, encouraging progress, presenting the template to win, and monitoring the team members' developmental process (Baird et al., 2020).

### **Historical Context**

The position of the college head football coach dates to the first college football game between Princeton and Rutgers in 1869 (Tutka, 2021). The college head coaching salary has increased tremendously since the beginning of college football. The salary of HFCs went from a few thousand to up to eleven million dollars in 2023. (Leeds et al., 2020). Past-time college head coaches were less in demand than modern coaches due to the limited number of teams and the newly developing sport's limited revenue from a small fan market (Simmons et al., 2018). The expansion of college football began to require more HCs at the collegiate level, and the leadership methods revolved around developing a winning team (Watterson, 2020). The highly profitable markets influence the increase in college HFCs' salaries in college football (Moore, 2019), and winning HCs generates profits for the institution due to success (Omondi-Ochieng, 2019). Methods to lead a college football program continue to evolve, and social norms among coaches may determine acceptable HC behavior (Schull, 2019).

An institution grants HCs majority control over program team members, enabling the HC to develop the outlook for program functionality (Salaga, 2020). Ensuring the head coach administers proper leadership methods to enable team member success is what athletic directors

establish to cultivate a progressive team environment (Pike-Lacy et al., 2021). The authoritarian leadership style of a college HFC in the 19th century took on a perspective of aggression, physicality, strength, speed, and teamwork (Hagerty, 2023). The modern HC may typically administer the TL style that revolves around team building, personal uplifting, inspiring, developing, preparing, and educating team members (Nixon, 2020). The leadership approach of college HFCs has altered from a physical outlook to a technical and more progressive style.

### **Social Context**

The direct population of college head football coaches is the coaching staff and student-athletes. The HC method can dictate a response from assistant coaches and student-athletes, resulting in positive and negative outcomes (Bandura, 2018). When a student-athlete chooses a school to play football, developing physically and intellectually is the HC objective (Darvin, 2018). Assistant coaches also seek growth as position coaches, and the head coach is in a leadership position to enable personal development, self-fulfillment, and an enhanced coaching outlook, which can encourage a good financial outlook (Darvin, 2020). The head football coach's method directly affects all team members' lives when following the directions, the action plan, and the strategies enacted by the head coach.

A college HFC may have full authority over the team, and an institution's athletic director has liability for overall team members, including the HC (Wood et al., 2019). Any mishap or inappropriate behavior can tie back to the institution. The athletic director ensures safe and proper conduct among all athletic department members and instructs the HCs to manage this aspect. The methods by which a head coach leads determine the team environment and member satisfaction. The athletic director relies on proper leadership among HCs to ensure that team members are properly guided, taught, and developed to succeed in part of the HC's job

expectations (Wood et al., 2019). Alumni tend to invest in the football program's success from the school attended and associated directly with administrator and head coaches due to offering financial support to the athletic department (Baumer, 2019; Faria et al., 2019). There are many beneficiaries of the head coach's leadership due to being associated with a winning program. Those directly affected by the leadership methods are the student-athletes associated with the program, the coaching staff, the athletic director, and the alumni involved in the sport.

### **Theoretical Context**

The leader's impact on an organization's outcome is crucial to achieving program goals (Oreg, 2019)—the value of leadership results in developing individuals to lead in higher education. A leader's initiative and action plan are primary factors that guide team members, instill developmental strategies, inspire ongoing production, and create a progressive environment (Mishra, 2018). Leadership in sports is a primary component due to effective leading outcomes. HFCs are the primary leaders within an athletic organization, and the direction in which the HC leads is the main factor in whether the team succeeds (Kochanek, 2019). The value of college HFC has increased tremendously due to the demand for a successful Division 1 (D1) football program (Farmer, 2010).

Bass's (1995) transformational leadership theory frames this study. Transformational leadership theory encompasses the nature of a college football head coach and how to guide team members. Leadership concepts such as intellectual stimulation, inspiration and motivation, individualized considerations, and idealized influence present critical aspects of leading as a college HFC (Bass, 2006). Transformational leadership theory presents the main concepts of leadership the HFC utilizes to develop and prepare athletes and presents the perspective of research used in this study.

Determining how a college head coach leads the football program portrays leadership approaches that contribute to success. A college HFC can use many strategies to guide team members, and the TL theory accurately depicts the role of an athletic HC (Macquet, 2021). The lived experiences the HFC encompasses are the foundation for the leadership approach utilized (Van Manen, 2021). The evolution of the styles of leading a football program can help determine methods to succeed in college football. By determining the modern methods of leadership HCs are currently utilizing, the coaches' values become a critical component for success in college football. Head football coaches' leadership styles are essential for success while ensuring team members' well-being and depict the overall influence of a college football head coach.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that some college head football coaches fail to develop and prepare student-athletes for success while earning significant financial gain (Leeds, 2020). Poor coaching leadership strategies can result in an abuse of power that often occurs as an alternative to leading effectively, which results in a decrease in team member development (Bryson et al., 2021). The substantial compensation college HFCs earn in correlation to the perceived leadership value should bring success but often does not (Bryson et al., 2021). Identifying the differences in leading a college football program can help determine successful and poor leadership strategies. Winning is an essential component of success in college football due to associated league rankings, increased popularity, and profit growth; outstanding success is required to compete for a championship (Cole, 2018).

The head coach leads the team by enabling assistant coaches and players to develop in a particular manner that becomes a product of that leadership style (Hall et al., 2021). The HCs' leadership styles are primary determinants for success in college football as they affect the

environment in which team members are present during development (Parnell et al., 2018). Describing and interpreting the differences in college HFCs' leadership approaches concludes which leadership strategies are effective for attaining success in college football. The demand for adequate HCs in college football comes from the intent of getting enough wins and striving to compete for a championship (Urquhart et al., 2020). Due to consistent expectations for HFCs' success, they achieved winning percentages and championships, which are the primary elements that define outstanding achievement (Sparvero, 2013). This study describes and interprets the causes of winning success in college football and presents the primary factors for leading appropriately as a head football coach.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to describe and interpret the successful winning leadership approaches for college head football coaches. At this stage in the research, successful leadership approaches are defined as the methodology in which the head football coach guides, instructs, and develops a winning team (Pankow et al., 2018). The theory guiding this research is transformational leadership, depicted by Bass (1995), and provides a foundation for exhibiting leadership as a college football head coach. Transformational leadership shapes this study to discover and interpret correlating winning leadership strategies among the participants.

### **Significance of the Study**

The section presents the outlook for the theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives depicting the relevancy and application of the hermeneutic study. The theoretical significance focuses on how the HFC develops, prepares, and leads team members, which contributes to attained results (Ewing, 2019). The empirical significance portrays how the study filled gaps in



research regarding leadership styles among organizational leaders, primarily college head coaches. The practical significance presents the applicability of research findings and how the overarching audience may utilize this phenomenological study. This study aims to provide a structure and outlook for college head coaches' leadership strategies based on methods that winning college HFCs utilize.

### **Theoretical**

The justification for paying HFCs such substantial salaries is proven and projected by services to lead, develop, and guide a winning college football program that generates ideal revenue for the athletic department (Leeds et al., 2020). Describing and interpreting the leadership styles that winning college football head coaches administer within the organization depicts a proven structure to lead team members. The immense salary HFCs earn related to the revenue generated by the program has been continuously examined by researchers, and the level of success a college head coach attains attracts the financial support of those affiliated with the football program (Elendu, 2017). The theoretical framework follows Bass's (1995) transformational leadership to structure research for appropriate leadership theory foundation for college head coaches. This study seeks to understand the leadership styles that current college HFCs administer to determine which leadership strategies are proven to achieve a higher rate of winning.

### **Empirical**

By describing and interpreting the leadership styles of multiple winning college HFCs, successful leadership methods can be expressed and deciphered among unique approaches to leading a college football program. The effectiveness of organizational leadership is constantly researched within numerous industries, including areas in medicine, education, politics, and

athletics. Limited research regarding head coaching leadership strategies inhibits knowledge of properly leading team members in organized sports. Leadership in college athletics is gaining popularity among researchers due to the increased revenue from college football and basketball (Horky, 2021). Each participant's lived experience presents applicable leadership strategies and characteristics primarily applied to enhance college HFC's leadership approach and head coaches within other organized sports.

### **Practical**

This research study aims to discover and interpret leadership strategies that contribute to the success of a winning college football head coach. Leadership in athletics is essential to direct organized team schematics to prevail in competition (Malloy, 2021). Discovering and interpreting college HFC-winning leadership styles exemplifies the prosperous effects of the head coach's leadership on fellow HFCs, assistant coaches, head coaches of other sports, student-athletes, athletic administrators, and alums involved with the football program. College HFCs use many strategies to create a winning football program, and the HC becomes a primary determinant of competitive outcomes (Seifried et al., 2019). Athletic department administrators can utilize the findings in this study to enhance the vision of athletic program development and embody a structure to develop head coaches. Research findings can also assist student-athletes and parents to foresee the current HC's leadership tendencies. They can determine if joining a specific institution is the right choice due to the impact of the HC. Transformational leadership theory frames the principles encompassing the nature of leading as a college head coach (Bass, 1995). TL can be adopted as a foundation for coaches of all ages in sporting competitions. Determining how a winning head coach leads organizational team members, developmental leadership strategies, and team environment can be sought by leaders involved within any

organizational industry.

### **Research Questions**

The lived leadership experiences of a college HFC are vital to the team's success and reflect in all facets of the program (Vaughn et al., 2021). To provide a grounded perspective of research involving the HFCs leadership phenomenon, the central and sub-research questions present the vision for this study. The central question presents the broad objective of successful leadership in sports, while the sub-research questions focus on the hermeneutic phenomena involving TL's four pillars. These research questions provide the visionary backbone for this study that dives into leadership styles and experiences.

#### **Central Research Question**

What are the lived experiences of winning college HFCs leadership initiatives?

#### **Sub-Question One**

How do winning college HFCs describe interactions with individual staff members and athletes?

#### **Sub-Question Two**

How do winning college HFCs explain initiatives for influencing staff members and athletes?

#### **Sub-Question Three**

How do winning college HFCs ensure preparation among staff members and athletes?

#### **Sub-Questions Four**

How do winning college HFCs describe how to stimulate staff members and athletes intellectually?

### **Definitions**

1. *Leadership*: Guiding and directing two or more people to achieve a common goal or objective (Daniëls et al., 2019).
2. *Transformational Leadership*: A form of leadership that enables positive change among team members through intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, individual considerations, and inspirational motivation to develop members to conduct their organizational roles (Bass, 1995).
3. *Phenomenology*: The concept of focusing on the lived experiences of a given topic or subject (Creswell, 2018).

### **Summary**

The demand for ideal college football head coaches originates from the demand for a successful team that results in increased profits, the pursuit of a championship, and the development of team members. A description of the historical, social, and theoretical context represents the relevancy and evolution of leadership in college football while portraying applicable relations among affiliates within college athletics. The purpose, problem, and significance statements regarding winning leadership styles among college HFCs present the vitality of leading as a college HC. An in-depth perspective on HC leadership styles, TL, and the impact on student-athlete development portrays the value of a successful college HFC.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

The transformational leadership (TL) theory is the theoretical framework used to identify the tendencies and styles of leadership as a college head football coach (HFC). Transformational leadership is a method HFCs utilize to transform team members to perform at a successful level by focusing on the operational status and development and guiding followers in the outlook of the HC (Bass, 1995). The theoretical framework presents the foundational viewpoint for research, and the variables that compose TL present an approach that seeks winning aspects of HFCs leadership that help shape the research in the theory. A literature review depicts past research on transformational leadership, organizational leadership, coaching college football and athletics, being a college head coach (HC) and an HFC, and athletic administration relations. The literature review presents applicable research to support TL in coaching college athletics. It portrays a perspective of a leadership phenomenon that is being sought to understand winning methods to lead as a head football coach. The many avenues that require direct leadership involvement from a college HFC are further analyzed and supported by various applicable literature.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Introduced by James Downton in 1973 (Egli, 2021), transformational leadership theory utilizes a different approach than transactional in conjoining a group to develop and prepare to work towards a common ideal (Eliyana, 2019). Burns and Bass expanded on Downton's initial perspective of transformational leadership (Gatson, 2021), and TL gained credibility as a compelling depiction of a successful leadership style (Reza, 2019). Transformational leadership is an effective method of leading by developing team members (Legutko, 2020) and attaining

organizational goals, and it significantly achieves organizational member commitment (Cho et al., 2019). The impact Bass (1995) had on transformational leadership created the current understanding of the theory as it applies to organizational settings. Transformational leaders aim to have a motivational influence to create common goals and perspectives of standards, operations, and protocols (Bass, 1995). Utilizing the TL style focuses on communication, ideology, inspiration, and guidance to help obtain member cooperation and commitment (Kristiana, 2021). TL enables proper data analysis by seeking predetermined aspects of leading and interpreting phenomena through the lens of TL theory. By interpreting and analyzing data with a foundation of TL, this research identified valid results for leadership conclusions.

The four principles, also called the Four I's, portray elements of transformational leadership theory that contribute to effective leadership (Bass, 2006). Each of the four variables presents different avenues and approaches a transformational leader pursues to lead by example, instruct, inspire, and educate team members to perform required duties (Bass, 1995). The four principles of TL theory depict the leadership role of a college HFC due to the dynamic approach to guiding and developing a football program (Bass, 2021). Idealized influence signifies the importance of the leader's behavior and conduct because TL portrays a sense of enabling similar behaviors among all members (Sutanto et al., 2021). If a leader aims to transform team members respectably to implement organizational standards, exemplifying ideal work ethic and behavior to initiate the organization is adhered to when the highest leaders portray the same behavior (Alqatawenh, 2018). Idealized influence enables leaders to take action to portray the ideal standard for member workplace conduction (Bass, 2006). If a leader fails to practice personal organizational principles, a sense of hypocrisy becomes evident among team members (Efron et al., 2018). Idealized influence becomes a major asset for transformational leaders seeking to

instill positive change within organizational team members by regularly presenting the leader's standard of conduct.

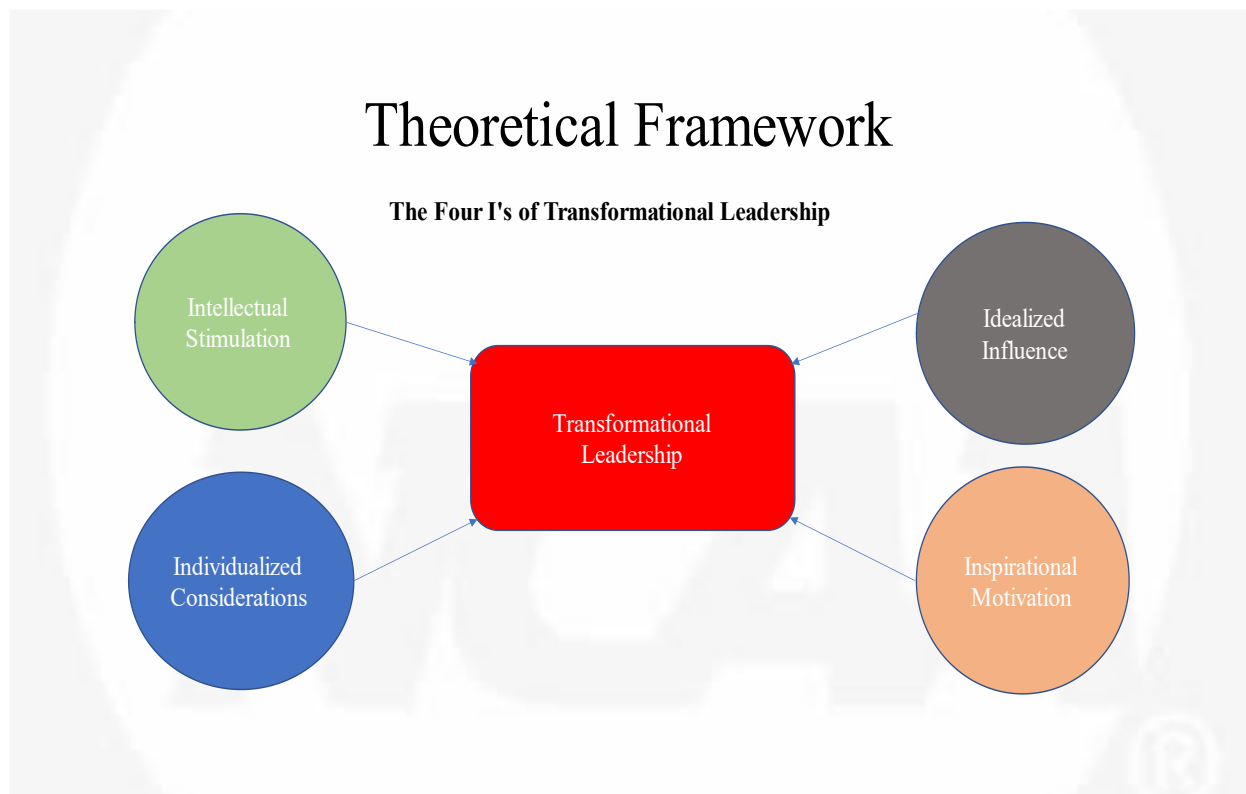
In addition to idealized influence, individualized considerations are the primary component of transformational leadership, enabling leaders to value all team members (Bass, 2006). The success and well-being of each team member present a setting that allows leaders to uplift each member regardless of status or experience (Poghosyan, 2018). Each member of a college football program presents extensive time and dedication to ensure that each staff member administers organizational standards, and that student-athletes exhibit program values (Romano, 2018). Transformational leadership encompasses considering the well-being of each member of an organization. It prioritizes the leader's input to ensure each member completes responsibilities while progressing individually (Bass, 1995). Furthermore, leaders guide followers while encouraging, motivating, and inspiring team members (Jiang et al., 2018).

The significance of inspirational motivation presents a foundational approach of TL that encapsulates the leader's input that enables enthusiasm and increased ambition among team members (Bass, 2006). Developing team members may present issues that can deter worker motivation, and leaders have the role of creating a sense of inspiration within the organization (Paais, 2020). Failure to ensure team members sustain a productive level of motivation to administer responsibilities may limit the development and outcome of the organization (Andersen et al., 2018). There are many approaches a leader may utilize when inspiring and motivating team members (Ozkeser, 2019), and the effectiveness of a leader's method to maintain and enhance organizational-affiliated ambition may result in worker dedication, appreciation for attained job titles while providing quality services (Razak, 2018). Organizational production relies on all team members, and the method by which a leader prepares and inspires

followers could either diminish, maintain, or enhance the workplace environment (Graves, 2018). As a result, organizational outcomes rely on the leader's initiative to ensure proper development, encouragement, and productivity. An analysis of the HFC leadership role infuses transformational leadership theory's viewpoint to configure successful leadership methods.

The fourth variable of TL theory is intellectual stimulation, which depicts how leaders focus on how team members are mentally stimulated (Bass, 2006). Intellectual stimulation requires leaders to influence team members to enhance cognitive function to create open-mindedness and increased mental focus (Bass, 1995). The outcome of team members being intellectually stimulated may lead to innovative ideas and workplace efficiency while thoroughly understanding organizational objectives and structure (Thuan, 2020). Enhancing worker mentality helps create a sense of trust among organizational team members while leaders ensure followers are properly developed mentally (Crane, 2018). Stimulating team members may require different approaches depending on the state of mind among team members (Shin, 2021). Some team members may need to be more consistently stimulated due to a lack of motivation and limited cognitive capacity; members may suffer from a mental disability or may have limited work-affiliated experience (Udin, 2020). Leaders structure the approach to strategically stimulate team members' mentality to enhance the frame of mind among organizational affiliates. Located below and in Appendix C, Figure 1 portrays the four I's of transformational leadership.



**Figure 1***The Four I's of Transformational Leadership*

Each component of the 4 I's plays a vital role in transformational leadership, and each variable is necessary for TL to have a practical outcome (Ausat et al., 2022). The 4 I's focus on considering the well-being of team members and emphasizing the leader's role to ensure team members are prepared to administer responsibilities while maintaining workplace satisfaction (Boamah et al., 2018). The effectiveness of transformational leadership is administered through each of the four I's (Alqatawenh, 2018), and each variable is initiated through the leader's strategies for organizational development. Each of the four variables in TL provides leaders with a foundational approach to guide, develop, and consider each team member to enable the highest level of workplace production. The components of transformational leadership are essential to

administer organizational change through TL theory. The effectiveness of TL relies on each of the four variables.

Transformational leadership is a prominent leadership theory depicted by Bass (1995) and has been researched concerning numerous industries' leadership aspects. Liu (2019) researched how organizational leaders utilize TL due to the structure used within the 4 I's to guide and develop team members. Transformational leadership is a topic of interest for research involving the educational sector. As a result of its being consistently used among educators, Berkovich (2016) researched TL to dismiss the use of the theory among university administrators due to the lack of modern effectiveness. Berkovich (2016) concluded that TL should not be dismissed from being among educational leaders due to its relevance in guiding institutional values. TL and servant leadership were proven to be highly effective methods for leading academic pharmacy programs due to the nature of coursework (Allen et al., 2016). Liu (2019) concluded that the absence of transformational leadership in the hospitality field and referred to the lack of application of leadership theory as a major downfall of the hospitality industry due to increased organizational efficiency. The appropriateness of transformational leadership is researched within various industries, and Hickman (2018) emphasized the value of TL in the information technology industry. Leadership theories have been associated with coaching athletics, and TL has been a prominent approach to leading different sporting programs. Youth, high school, and college athletics rely on inspirational and direct guidance from coaches who administer TL theory (Arthur, 2017). Coaches who administer TL in the approach in which they lead athletes have attained a higher rate of player loyalty (Oh, 2023). Transformational leadership can be applied to coaches within various sports such as football, basketball, volleyball, baseball, soccer, and any sport that requires rigor where an athlete's mental and

physical capacity is challenged (Mills, 2017). The TL structure involving the 4 I's enables transformational leadership to obtain member standard output effectively. Although, the 4 I's also present limitations and shortcomings within the specific leadership approach.

Each leadership theory has pros and cons, distinguishing each leading method's strategic and unique approach. Transformational leadership administers the 4 I's as the methodology to lead team members. Samad (2012) developed findings that support how the 4 I's present a limitation to overall leadership conduction by limiting areas leading to only four categories. Hoch et al. (2018) describe how the simplicity of transformational leadership variables limits the scope of leadership impact that servant or transactional leadership may carry. While comparing and contrasting the benefits of TL and transactional leadership, Ma (2018) studied and concluded how different leadership theories may present a broader spectrum of variables to address leadership strategies and enable ideal team outcomes compared to transformational leadership (Ma, 2018). The specificity of the transformational leadership approach limits the overarching methodology leaders could access if using a different leadership approach (Ma, 2018). In a fundamental context, TL can be sufficient to create positive organizational change and enable team member development through unique leadership methods.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study focuses on college HFC leadership styles and approaches and which methods lead to success. A college HFCs natural tendencies and directions take the initiative to guide and develop student-athletes to succeed as students (Fridley et al., 2022) and follow the perspective of the TL theory as a result. TL theory focuses on a leader with qualities that enable an environment that encourages growth and development (Bass, 1995) while encouraging proper procedural conduction for success (Asbari, 2020). The TL theory depicts the role of a college football coach by interpreting the necessity to prepare, guide,

and develop team members to achieve an ideal outcome (Bass, 2006). Transformational leadership can be applied to leading a college football program due to the progressiveness of TL theory when managing and developing organizational members (Bass, 1995). TL provides the basis for data collection approaches by navigating avenues of leadership within a winning college program (Haddad et al., 2021).

### **Related Literature**

The foundation of college athletics attracts individuals with numerous skills to suit a successful college football program. The literature depicts aspects of head coaching leadership and its impact on the team. Leadership involving student-athletes and organizational development is part of the HC leadership approach. This literature review identifies the need for the coach's direct input and initiative to positively impact the team's outcome (Salaga, 2020). Aligning the role of a college HFC with TL presents a common perception of directing individuals and inspiring team members to develop, unite, and execute required responsibilities (Kao et al., 2021). Affiliated organizational industries can be represented throughout the related literature.

### **Education in Coaching**

The effect of organizational leadership can directly affect the operational status and obtained outcomes (Turner, 2019). Leadership strategies and efforts are a primary indicator of organizational outlook and are relied on by industry leaders. College athletics require proper leadership practices (Robinson, 2019), and the role of a college coach portrays an ideal approach to leading. There are numerous developmental strategies to enhance coaches' education regarding performance, and the coaching education foundation of a college coach is accessible to enhance the coaching staff (Gordon, 2021). Proper coaching development is obtained from an

administrative source and delivers guidance and tools for coaching conduction (Ciampolini et al., 2019; Gordon, 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Oregon, 2019). Multiple phases of coaching education incorporate engagement, exploration, explanation, elaboration, and evaluation (Gordon, 2021). Coaching instruction falls into the coach development approach through the HC educational program, and institutional administrators highly value the leadership role of the HFC (Moon, 2022). HCs are the primary leaders within a given athletic program, and overall conduction is a primary determinant of organizational outcomes.

The value of a coach lies in the ability to communicate effectively to enable athlete development and preparation to compete and perform in a strategically organized manner (Griffo et al., 2019). However, not all coaches contain exceptional traits and characteristics to teach and inspire athletes as effectively as possible (Kim et al., 2021). HCs have the leadership role of administering educational programs that aim to continue to develop coaching staff members to provide athletes with the highest value of coaching (Urquhart et al., 2020). There are numerous sectors in a college athletic program where coaches service the student-athlete, such as academic progress, athletic bodily development, schematic instruction, technique training, and mentality encouragement (Lopes Dos Santos et al., 2020). HC's educational influence enhances coach-to-athlete engagement through teaching regimens that implement the HC leadership outlook to develop a competitive team (Rathwell et al., 2014). The coaching staff conducts the HC's vision to cultivate a winning team (Healy et al., 2019). By administering ongoing education, the HC ensures coaches are fully aware of essential components of leadership strategies.

### **Athletic Department Education**

A college coach should be familiar with all components of the program to adhere to university procedures and protocols (Maclean, 2016). Administrative education gives athletic

staff members a full briefing on behavioral standards that meet institutional guidelines (Gordon, 2021). Athletic directors have an authoritative role in ensuring that the HCs within each sport implement professional conduct that suits the university's standards (Lee, 2019). A code of ethics, objectives, and behavior throughout the program should be discussed in a learning environment so athletic departments establish a sense of confidence in the HCs' comportment (Gordon, 2021). The liability involved with the role of a head coach is significant due to the safety and well-being of student-athletes and staff members presenting extreme importance for a university's standards of care (Sawyer, 2019). Thoroughly educating head coaches for all sports within a college athletic department helps ensure each program leader is briefed on essential knowledge to guide HCs to appropriately lead the program (Nelson et al., 2013). The leadership imitative of the HC carries considerable influence among all team members, and by ensuring proper educational parameters among coaches, athletic departments cultivate effective and professional HCs.

A college sports program contains many sectors that carry various purposes aimed at serving the student-athlete (Van Rens et al., 2019). College athletic departments aim to provide student-athletes with the most beneficial services to guide and help develop players in pursuing a college degree, athletic affiliation, and overall well-being (Otto et al., 2019). Athletic departments ensure HCs are fully aware of essential program components that enable the coaching staff to serve the athlete effectively (Judge et al., 2019). The HC informs assistant coaches on the educating concepts that HCs undergo to provide the entire coaching staff with administrative background on vital program components that enable student athletes' success (Brecht, 2019). Providing the highest quality experience for the student-athlete is a foundational approach and goal for athletic departments by ensuring HCs and staff members are fully aware

of vital program material (Gomez et al., 2018).

### ***Title IX Education***

Title IX is an essential topic in education and college athletics. Under the education of amendments, Title IX was enacted in 1972 and protected individuals from discrimination of sex within educational programs or activities that receive federal assistance (Newins et al., 2018; Perry, 2022; Staurowsky, 2019; Stevenson, 2007; Thelin, 2000). This federal mandate helped eliminate the discriminatory treatment of females in higher education and the activities involved in higher education, specifically participating in collegiate sports (Druckman et al., 2018). Before Title IX, female sports were uncommon in federally funded schools, and organized sporting events were non-existent (Perry, 2022). The impact of Title IX is substantial in the modern era to continue to enact inclusion and equality in education and sports within publicly funded institutions.

Athletic administrators educate head coaches about the importance of adhering to Title IX to ensure each athletic program meets federal requirements (Druckman et al., 2018). Equal opportunities for men and women in sports are made available by Title IX to prevent discrimination from either sex or to provide the opportunity to compete in a gender-specific sport (Staurowsky, 2019). HCs become informed on how Title IX is being adhered to by the athletic department, the role of each athletic program in meeting Title IX, and how to continue to follow Title IX guidelines (Wiersma-Mosley, 2018; Odio et al., 2019). Title IX and publicly funded athletics are directly affiliated, and HCs are made aware of correlating knowledge to be in coherence with this federal mandate. Coaches should know Title IX and how the legislation affects the conduction and outlook as a head coach (Staurowsky, 2019).

### ***Sexual Harassment Education***

As a result of the influx of women in sports because of Title IX, men and women are working cohesively together within many male and female sporting events (Odio et al., 2019). Sexual harassment is a potential occurrence because both males and females work in proximity within the athletic department and the university. Athletic departments teach the extensiveness of sexual harassment and how to behave appropriately with others to prevent any discomforting actions (Bisgaard, 2019). There are many approaches to educating organizational team members about sexual harassment, such as online training sessions with video examples that correlate quiz-like questions to ensure that related material is understood (Bingham, 2001; Bisgaard, 2019; Fasting, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2018). Professionals in sexual harassment education may also speak to coaches about workplace behavior. Having an in-person speaker to discuss sexual harassment education with coaches presents various perspectives, circumstances, and questions arising from gender diversity in sports (Cipriano et al., 2022). The topic of sexual harassment can be extensive due to the nature of sexually explicit behaviors, and instructional courses can be thorough in exemplifying sexual harassment in-depth and how to appropriately behave with male and female employees (Bondestam, 2020). Education involving sexual harassment has become essential in athletics because of the inclusion driven by Title IX (Cipriano et al., 2022). Educating sexual harassment behaviors, protocols, and etiquette within athletic departments is essential to guiding athletic staff members to success and avoiding misconduct or personal misconduct (Fasting, 2009).

### ***Compliance Education***

Compliance education is a common sub-section of administrative education typical amongst most college athletic departments. Compliance is the NCAA guidelines and rules that



are required to be adhered to by athletic staff members (Epstein, 2018). NCAA compliance involves rules and regulations involving recruiting, student-athlete treatment, allocated time for team activities, and educational progress (Epstein, 2018; Evans, 2018; Flaherty, 2020; Lens et al., 2023; O'Brien, 2022; Pellegrini, 2018). Adherence to NCAA rules and requirements is essential to stay in compliance to maintain team eligibility, avoid league sanctions, and prevent any termination due to not following compliance (O'Brien, 2022). Recruiting and time restrictions are two primary sectors of compliance emphasized within athletic departments due to the NCAA's stance on obeying rules and bylaws (Humphreys, 2018).

Compliance with recruiting is significant in ensuring that all competing programs have the same circumstances and opportunities to recruit and attain student-athletes (O'Brien, 2022). Significant penalties could occur for not staying compliant with recruiting, and the HC may be held responsible for assistant coaches breaking bylaws (Evans, 2018). The administrators often brief staff members on recruiting protocols to discuss various scenarios to prepare coaches to comply with league rules and regulations (Flaherty, 2020). In addition to recruiting compliance, the NCAA has a prompt time restriction for athletic-related activities that athletic departments monitor closely (Lens et al., 2023). Educating coaches on time restrictions helps avoid any unplanned activities that may surpass the allotted time to coach the athletes. Athletic departments attempt due diligence to prepare coaches to succeed and avoid falling into compliance-threatening circumstances (Pellegrini, 2018).

### ***Compliance Education***

Member institutions in the NCAA are involved with the community in many capacities. Community members may often attend games to cheer and provide moral support, provide team sponsorships, and even represent teams through merchandise and logos (Warner, 2013). Having

support from the community helps increase revenue through ticket sales, merchandise purchases, and obtaining potential donations (Franke, 2003). Acquiring fan attendance also aids the home team in creating as much vocal support as possible during the competition. Homefield advantage plays a major role in providing a competitive edge due to the crowd noise presenting moral support, enabling a positive effect for the home team and, ideally, an adverse effect for the away team (Franke, 2003; Jamieson, 2010; Myers, 2014; Sors et al., 2019; Warner, 2013). Local businesses engage with athletic department members to create relationships to help encourage potential sponsorships for the business and the local college (Schulenkorf, 2012). These sponsorships involve providing goods or services to the athletic department, representing the university image, or even having the university market the sponsoring business (Bee, 2021). Aside from athletic department administrators, head coaches engage in community involvement to create rapport to attain community member support for a specific athletic program rather than for the entire athletic department, where funds can be split among different sports (Alonso-Dos-Santos et al., 2018). Coaches often take valuable community members to restaurants and golf outings or even invite them into the coach's home to create a relationship that ideally results in donations to the athletic program (Fraina, 2020). Community support requires a relationship between head coaches, athletic administrators, and community members so all parties know the business relationship between the college and the local sponsor.

### **Assistant Coach Development**

The nature of a college assistant coach involves developing, preparing, mentoring, and inspiring student-athletes to succeed in the classroom and on the field (Howe, 2018). Some staff members fulfill the role of position coaches since the assistant coach oversees a positional group on either the offensive or defensive side (Rathwell et al., 2014). Position coaches have personal

tendencies and unique methods to teach student-athletes the dynamics of their positional responsibilities, which could differ from the HC ideal approach. Assistant coaches must adhere to the HC's philosophy and instruction for student-athlete development, and if restriction occurs, the HC's progress may be limited (Bako, 2018; Ewing, 2019; Maher, 2021; Rathwell et al., 2014). The HC collaborates with the assistants to pursue the common goal of success while enabling the coaching staff to progress student skills and abilities to enable a winning outcome (Maher, 2021). Assistant coaches may have differing views on the HFC's vision for player development, and head coaches should acquire staff members who adhere to the coaching process. Managing staff members enables assistant coaches to provide the highest level of coaching by ensuring that all coaches administer proper teaching tactics to progress athletes effectively (Blackett et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2020; Rathwell et al., 2014; Wasend, 2019). When a student-athlete is not athletically performing to team standards, blaming the player should never be an excuse. Instead, the position coach is responsible for developing and preparing the student-athlete to perform adequately. The head coach's influence, guidance, and direction enable assistants to administer the coach's action plan to develop and prepare student-athletes to be successful scholars and athletes (Rathwell et al., 2014).

### ***Development of Football Staff Communication***

Communication methods are essential for cooperation within most organizational settings (Cornelissen, 2020). Each head coach has a unique approach to staff conduction, and the method in which the HC coordinates team operations is constantly expressed among the staff (Blackett et al., 2018). Communication is a powerful tool for conveying meaning and interpretations of common objectives (Choi et al., 2020; Davis et al., 2018; Kalogiannidis, 2020; McLaren, 2018; Rebrina, 2019; Van Ruler, 2018). HCs utilize this reciprocation to guide numerous individuals to

compete athletically toward team goals (Cherubini, 2019). With the HC enabling a setting in which staff members are aware of meeting times, etiquette, and proper jargon, team communication can be highly effective in administering team standards (Choi et al., 2020). A constant observation of how team members are associated with each other can depict the status of team conduction that presents issues or reaffirm adequate communication (Choi et al., 2020). There are many team settings where communication occurs and ensures appropriate conversations arise. The HC is solely responsible for developing and critiquing communication among team members.

### ***Coach to Athlete Communication***

The HC enables assistant coaches to instruct student-athletes and associate with team members to enhance coaches' effective communication (McLaren, 2018). The HC influences to ensure appropriate communication between student-athletes and coaching staff members, enabling a continuous learning environment (Van Raalte et al., 2019). Coaches speak with players in various settings, such as meeting rooms, during practices and workouts, away game trips, and private meeting sessions (Ferrar et al., 2018). Communication dynamics are significant for student-athlete development (Cranmer et al., 2018; Cranmer et al., 2020; Cushion, 2018; Ferrar et al., 2018; Preston et al., 2021; Van Raalte et al., 2019). Communication between coaches and student-athletes should present a professional, respectful, and progressive setting to enable player development (Kim, 2020). Head coaches have the authority to critique and guide conversing scenarios between coaches and players to enable the most effective and appropriate methods of communication (Preston et al., 2021). The implications of coach-to-player communication are highly beneficial or detrimental depending on the conversation (Freire et al.,

2022). The HC has the leadership role of setting how coaches should speak with student-athletes in various settings.

### ***Development of Coaches Teaching Methods***

Numerous leading methods get similar results in an organizational design, yet leaders in different programs require a particular approach to achievement (Fjeldstad, 2018). College athletic departments are composed of numerous team members with different experiences, perspectives, and mentalities that influence the outlook and operations among team members (Bell et al., 2018; Cornelissen, 2020; Cust et al., 2019; Fjeldstad, 2018; Lefebvre et al., 2022). Some HCs may strive to implement a unique teaching element in the coaching approach (Cust et al., 2019). Many coaches have methods of teaching sport-related information derived from past experiences. Depending on the HFCs' outlook, assistant coaches may need to alter teaching methods to suit the vision of the HCs' leadership. The HC may implement specific and unique methods for teaching sport-related techniques, schemes, and mentalities to ensure all coaches exhibit the most effective method of teaching student-athletes (Cilliers et al., 2020; Cust et al., 2019; Jiang, 2018). Assistant coaches may become resistant to altering teaching methods due to the belief and comfortability of the coaches' learning approach. So, immediate awareness of the HC's operations standards allows coaches to understand program standards directly. Hence, all coaches understand the dynamic of teaching conduction under the HCs' leadership (Jiang, 2018). There is no one method or approach to teaching sport-related skills and abilities. However, the method the HC finds most suitable should be implemented throughout all positions on a team to provide well-rounded and developed college athletes.

Effective communication becomes necessary within organizations when multiple individuals carry responsibilities vital to operational effectiveness (Kalogiannidis, 2020;

McLaren, 2018; Rebrina, 2019; Romano, 2018; Van Ruler, 2018). Coaches are primary communicators who express essential components for positional responsibilities, and the approach an HC communicates either leads to developed and prepared team members or an underdeveloped athlete (Davis et al., 2019). Coaches in an athletic college program ensure athlete readiness by instructing position-related schematics and techniques, behavioral conduct, academic success, bodily management, and physical development (Romano, 2018). The athlete's development and preparedness status lie in how well the coach instills and teaches primary concepts and technical bodily movements that enable the athlete to exemplify positional roles (Lefebvre et al., 2022). Coaches are teachers and directly influence the athlete's skills and abilities during competition because assistant coaches instruct the scheme, instill position-related techniques, and enhance an athlete's mentality (Knowles et al., 2020). Coaches have a significant impact on the development and outcome of student-athletes.

### **Integrating Professionalism Among Coaches**

An organizational design implements standards for workplace etiquette depending on the industry sector (Deale, 2021). For example, a lawyer expresses business casual attire while military soldiers wear issued uniforms. Industries use a particular jargon, and a sense of professionalism within a specific corporate sector is perceived as a result (Rebrina, 2019). Professionalism in athletics is essential to provide exceptional services to develop elite athletes, but quality can decrease due to the cultural norms of the sports industry (Walzel, 2018). The jargon in sports can sometimes be vulgar, aggressive, and pessimistic, depending on a coach's approach to teaching and developing athletes. Inappropriate language could be unwelcome and unprofessional (Beddoes et al., 2020; Merchie et al., 2018; Rebrina, 2019; Quennerstedt, 2019; Walzel, 2018).

The HC has the leadership role of setting program standards that enable the language to be spoken among coaches and team members and decides the dress code for staff members. Regardless of being in an exercise and sporting environment, coaches should exemplify the standard of professionalism a professor would have when a coach teaching student-athletes (Merchie et al., 2018) with the demeanor and approach of a personal trainer while a coach is training student-athletes during athletic events (Lucas et al., 2018). Those two perspectives of professionalism appropriately portray a sense of teaching sport-related concepts (Merchie et al., 2018; Stolz, 2014) while also training physical skill development (Cronin, 2018). Head coaches brief staff members regarding dress codes, acceptable language, and teaching approaches to ensure student-athletes are constantly serviced professionally (Beddoes et al., 2020). In some sports, such as football, hockey, or basketball, jargon and social norms may not follow typical professionalism but exemplify legitimacy and expertise (Schenk, 2019). However, the HFC has a leadership role that mandates an appropriate setting where a casual business appearance accompanied by sport-specific jargon to teach, develop, and prepare athletes for competition appropriately.

### **Ethics in Coaching**

A coach's role in athletics accompanies influence and control over others to enable organizational production within the sport (Kane, 2018). The power associated with coaching college athletes presents a setting where leaders can abuse power among team members through disrespect or mistreatment (Cushion, 2018; Hardman et al., 2010; Harriss et al., 2017; Koch, 2013; Zakrajsek et al., 2020). A college head coach has control over assistant coaches and staff members while overseeing the conduction of student-athletes, which enhances a sense of power over others (Zakrajsek et al., 2020). Leadership in athletics takes part in a setting where

professional conduct does not always occur. Instead, a leisure-like approach to communicating and associating with team members occurs. For instance, many football programs condone vulgar language, and coaches may express negative communication when speaking with players and staff members due to the norms within most football programs (Thompson et al., 2022). Athletes and staff members often receive disrespect by being yelled at, insulted, and treated with hostility if a mishap occurs since sports, especially football, present hostile and competitive situations where tempers rise. Arguments often occur (Araújo et al., 2019). By enabling a teaching environment where the student-athlete's best interest is at the core of each decision, coaches express an ethical approach to developing athletes with moral intent (Hardman et al., 2010).

HFCs embrace numerous leadership styles as a foundational team leadership approach (Wells, 2013). Some HCs may utilize authoritarian leadership, which places immense control over all other team members (Koch, 2013). Coaches will likely portray a dictatorship with authoritarian leadership since the perception of commands and obedience accompanying this leadership style lacks modern ethical behavior (Hwang et al., 2013; Koch, 2013; Li, 2021; Sudduth, 2018). Emotional intelligence is significant in ethical coaching since leadership styles may welcome abrasive actions and power over others (Hwang et al., 2013). Integrity in coaching is essential to cultivate an ethical environment where student-athletes are being developed, prepared, and mentored without negative expression or harassment (Agnew et al., 2017). Coaching athletics teaches and instructs sport-related concepts and correlated kinesiology (Quennerstedt, 2019). By teaching players to execute athletic material effectively and achieve success, coaches are encouraged to teach with the ethical intent to develop and prepare athletes with predetermined strategies (Harriss et al., 2017; Kane, 2018; Quennerstedt, 2019; Stolz,



2014). Coaches in all settings and levels require ethical approaches to teaching athletes to provide a safe and thriving environment for athletic practice and competition (Harriss et al., 2017).

### **Leadership in Player Well-being**

Education is an ongoing process throughout a lifetime, and applying the value of relatable education within most sectors of organizational operations can be highly beneficial for optional results (Agosto, 2018; Ferrar et al., 2018; Gordon, 2021; Lange, 2006). The health and safety of all team members are a primary concern for college HFC due to the severity of potentially unfortunate outcomes within the game's conduct. Football's frequent and drastic collisions are a primary cause of head impact injuries (Baugh et al., 2019), and the HC leadership role in handling concussion protocols. Baugh et al. (2019) emphasized how many concussions can go unreported. As a result, the severity of repeated head injuries increases, and Sawyer (2019) enforces that this liability falls under the leadership role of the HC. The well-being of team members is a priority of the head coach, and the vast number of duties the HC manages is essential for proper organizational conduct. However, the well-being of the student-athletes and assistant coaches should be at the core of all decisions. The HFC leadership regularly focuses on players' injuries, including head injuries, due to the sport's violent nature (Sawyer, 2019). Head coaches use the administered leadership approach and methods to manage team members' health and well-being. The physical and mental health of all team members requires precision leadership by the HFC to identify any detriment and to guide the team to a safe and wholesome outcome (Miller et al., 2019). Ensuring the well-being of team members is the primary sector of leadership among college HFCs, but this is just one avenue of the program that requires direct input, design, and direction from the HC.

### ***Managing Athletes' Health***

Sport-related activities come with various liabilities, and a particular sport's nature welcomes more risks than others (Carmody et al., 2020). Coaches are the direct supervisors when monitoring sport-related activities, prioritizing numerous aspects of student-athlete health and wellness (McCarthy, 2018). Student-athlete health and safety are significant due to the sports environment, the extensive participants involved, and the liability that occurs when conducting athletic activities (Charest, 2020; Edwards, 2023; McCarthy, 2018; Tomalski et al., 2019; Vento, 2020). Athletic administrators and coaches work cohesively to provide a safe sports setting and the highest level of player safety (Sulz et al., 2021). There are many approaches to cultivating a safe sporting environment, and the structure of coaching implementation can limit or increase the occurrence of hazards or harmful circumstances (Charest, 2020). Student-athlete health and wellness range from numerous conditions and situations but primarily revolve around prioritized major risk factors. Three significant areas of concern to ensure student-athlete health and wellness can be narrowed down to proper development for sport-related activities, concussions and injury protocols, and student-athlete mental health (Tomalski et al., 2019). Risk and injury are expected in athletics due to the nature of sport (Aicale et al., 2018), but a coach's invention can help cultivate an environment that caters to student-athlete health and wellness.

### ***Concussion Protocols***

On-set injuries are common and expected in sport-related activities, and the nature of a particular sport welcomes specific injuries (Aicale et al., 2018). Concussions in contact sports are a prevalent health issue that leads to adverse long-term mental and physical side effects (Adams et al., 2018; Anderson et al., 2021; Baugh et al., 2019; Chermann et al., 2018; Connolly et al., 2018; Fetta et al., 2023; Mack et al., 2019; McCrea et al., 2020). Football, hockey, and rugby are

primary contact sports where head injuries most commonly occur due to intensive bodily impact (Musumeci et al., 2019). Concussions are a primary concern for football athletes because players are put into scenarios and situations that result in bodily contact, causing common head injuries resulting in concussions becoming an outcome of the game (Dai et al., 2018). Major football organizations such as the National Football League (NFL) and the NCAA have tried to limit the number of on-set concussions sustained while enhancing related protocols (Castonguay, 2022; Connolly et al., 2018; Greenhow, 2022; Memmini et al., 2023; O'Brien, 2019; Reilly; 2019). Educating coaches regarding concussion protocols enables a promising outlook for teaching competitive skills to help prevent head injuries (Feiss et al., 2020). Awareness of concussion protocols enables coaches to understand the symptoms of a head injury and treat it promptly (Musumeci et al., 2019). Head injuries have become so common that HCs are trying to design practices to help limit concussions strategically.

Unreported head injuries are a significant issue in concussion protocols within all levels of competition (Cook, 2020). A second concussion that occurs without full recovery of the initial head injury results in second impact syndrome that causes major neurological complications due to excessive swelling in the cranium (Engelhardt et al., 2021). Coaches properly educated about concussion protocols are more likely to see concussion symptoms in student-athletes (Mack et al., 2019) and immediately cease all sport-related activities until athletic trainers have cleared the athlete for competition (Murphy et al., 2012). Sustaining repeated concussions is a concerning health condition with long-term adverse effects and occurs when head injuries go unreported (Anderson et al., 2021). Educating coaches about concussion protocols attempt to properly monitor student-athletes' health and safety during athletic-related events (Chermann et al., 2018). Concussions have been a significant issue in football safety, and a greater emphasis on player

well-being has continued to increase in terms of serving student-athletes ethically (Egan, 2019). The athlete's well-being is a primary coach's role, and each coach's decision should have the best intentions for the student-athletes (Kim et al., 2020). Safe competition is essential in athletics, and each coach's role helps ensure each team member's well-being.

### ***Coaching for Safe Competition***

The coach's role ensures that athletes use effective and safe playing techniques to avoid improper behavior. A coach's directive aims to develop bodily motor units that enable athletes to maneuver the body schematically. Failing to implement proper skills can put the athlete in harmful circumstances (Montalvo et al., 2019). Coaches may put student-athletes in harmful circumstances by overtraining players to the point where the body suffers injury from overuse (Aicale, 2018). The head coach cultivates an environment where athletes are developed to increase performance and avoid sport-related injuries, enabling proper preparation for a competition while safely increasing athletic skills and abilities (Emery, 2019). The HC and coaching staff influence student-athlete health and safety by implementing and monitoring athletic-related activities.

In addition to teaching sport-related skills and abilities, coaches mandate appropriate behavior among student-athletes (Bum, 2016). Arguments and physical altercations often arise, and the coach de-escalates the situation to ensure student-athlete safety (Smith, 2018). Athlete behavior threatens player safety more in contact sports such as football, hockey, basketball, and rugby (Smith et al., 2019). The HC monitors team safety and eliminates physical altercations that mitigate threatening violence or problematic altercations (Block, 2018; Pandey, 2020; Pittman, 2005). Team safety becomes a major priority during away games when traveling is necessary for competition. Teams use buses and potential airplanes to travel, stay in hotels before the

competition (Wicker, 2020), and consume food from outside sources for pre-game and post-game meals (Placentino et al., 2020). Traveling for away games presents a higher risk for player safety, and the HC puts coaches in place to ensure athletes are monitored and protected from blatant harm (Palozzi, 2018). The coaching staff for a team carries the responsibility to monitor student-athletes to ensure health and safety during any athletic-related activity.

### ***Mental Health Among Athletes***

The status of individuals' mental health issues increasingly presents concerns regarding health and safety (Breslin et al., 2022; Charest, 2020; Drew, 2021; Egan, 2019; Grasdalsmoen et al., 2020). A student-athlete is responsible for excelling academically and athletically to sustain status and eligibility as a college athlete. The stress of modern life and the toll of being a student-athlete presents an increased potential for mental health issues (Ballesteros, 2020; Cutler, 2020; Egan, 2019; Garver et al., 2021; Ryan, 2018). The student-athletes' mental health status is concerning due to the vulnerability of the athlete and the pressure endured from the role in a given sport, succeeding in the chosen degree program, and sustaining a social life with friends and family (Egan, 2019). There are many tell-tale signs of a student-athlete mental health status, and the constant interactions a coach may have with a student-athlete may help determine any mental health issues that arise (Tomalski et al., 2019). The risks involved with a mental health crisis can be tragic, and depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and eating disorders commonly occur among student-athletes. Related health effects present the potential for self-harm (Ströhle, 2019).

Mental health issues among student-athletes can result from pressure from balancing athletic performance and academic success (Ryan et al., 2018). A practical outlook for mental health enables head coaches to assess and enhance any issue arising from mental anguish

strategically (Kroshus et al., 2019). Providing essential resources and knowledge regarding different areas of mental health enables student-athletes to utilize gateway to attain assistance rather than enduring a mental crisis (Bird et al., 2020). Mental health awareness has gained much attention recently due to an increasing rate of mental issues and the alarming rate of students who commit suicide (Grasdalsmoen et al., 2020). Coaches are in a setting to diminish the rates of mental illness by being attentive to the mental well-being and attitudes of the student-athlete (Breslin et al., 2022). Athletic administrators are educating coaches on mental health and how to address student-athletes suffering from mental illness (Drew et al., 2021). Different platforms are in place to educate coaches, such as online modules, in-person lectures from mental health professionals, and knowledge regarding on-campus resources to assist students with mental issues (Wang, 2021). A legitimate emphasis on student-athlete mental health enacted by each team HC positively influences the player experience by providing an environment that seeks to develop, prepare, and nurture each team member. The health and safety of each team member is a primary concern for any HC, and ensuring the well-being of all athletes is a direct objective of the HC and athletic administration.

### **Athlete Sport-Related Development**

The rigor of a college football player can be excessive because of the nature of being a contact sport (Wojtys, 2018), and some positions are more forceful than others. Due to the highly violent hits administered by defensive players, tight ends, wide receivers, and running backs are the top three positions that suffer the most football-related injuries (Dai et al., 2018). Many factors contribute to sport-related injuries, often correlated to the strength and conditioning program. While the violent nature of the football game is a primary cause of injuries (Kluczynski et al., 2019), the HC has the authority to develop student-athletes mentally and physically, and

the initiative of the HFC potentially is detrimental to the player's well-being (Edwards et al., 2018). Having direct input within the conduct of the strength and conditioning program enables the HC to enhance player physical development, ensure the administration of effective and relatable workouts, and monitor athletes' skills and abilities (Shurley et al., 2020).

The method by which coaches develop student-athletes athletically enables the player to fulfill sport-related responsibilities as directed by the coach (Lefebvre et al., 2022). American football has eleven players, each playing a particular position to serve the team's offensive or defensive schemes. The teams that prevail enable all players to serve the responsibility against the opposition (Ward et al., 2018). The coach's role revolves around teaching offensive and defensive schematics by instilling position-related techniques to effectively maneuver the athlete's body (Pitts, 2019). By developing bodily motor units to administer forceful movements, coaches ensure athlete comprehension and progress to lead players to succeed (Pichardo et al., 2018). The team that prevails in competition empowers athletes to administer the game plan determined by the coaches against the trained opposition (Jang et al., 2019). The leadership initiative of the HC determines how staff members approach teaching, developing, and enhancing athletes' sport-related movements and mentality to defeat opponents across all positions to achieve victory (Gulbin, 2013).

### ***Physical Development***

Enabling optimal bodily development can help limit sport-related injuries, increase player production, improve motor units, and enhance the athletes' skills and abilities (Gleason et al., 2021). Developing an athlete's body involves extensive weight training, enhancing players' planes of motion, and teaching position-related techniques that prepare a student-athlete for success (Szedlak et al., 2018). The role of a coach is to put the best interests of the student-

athletes at the core of every decision, and the HFC strategy to develop players dictates overall effectiveness as a coach (Priest et al., 2018). By developing an athlete's body and correlating movements, the coach guides players to compete successfully and safely (Pichardo et al., 2018). The severity of the constant impacts and collisions may decrease due to proper muscular development and suppleness (Buckner et al., 2020).

The head football coach has the leadership, authority, and influence to create a developmental environment, and the outcome of the coach's leadership can be a cause for safety and success or harm and failure within sport-related activities (Lefebvre et al., 2021). Developing student-athlete's physical aspects requires proper teaching, monitoring, and guidance to ensure players' bodies are enhanced due to sport-related workouts (Woods et al., 2021). Strength and conditioning, skill development, and nutrition contribute to an athlete's physical development, enabling competitive outcomes (Till et al., 2021). The HC ensures athletes are progressively being developed by monitoring assistant coaches and the strength and conditioning program to confirm proper development on behalf of the coaching staff. Physical development is a coach's primary role, and the HC can be held responsible for the athlete's growth and progress.

### ***Mental Development***

Athletics involves administering physical movement in an organized team setting to defeat opponents (Harper et al., 2019). In addition to sport-related physical movement developed by the coaching staff, including the strength and conditioning coach (Lloyd, 2012), mental development becomes emphasized to enable team cohesion (Crust, 2010). The sporting mentality encompasses an athlete's attitude, emotional expression, and approach to learning sport-related schematics (Robinson et al., 2021). An athlete's mental development occurs in various settings, including adverse situations during practice and games, intensified workouts, and the



developmental process of learning a specific sport (Ford et al., 2011). The athletic competition encourages athletes to put forth a winning mentality to achieve team goals and overcome the opposition. Coaches are a primary source of developing student-athlete mentality as coaches fulfill the role of teachers, drill instructors, and mentors (Kim, 2016).

The HC enables the teaching environment within an athletic program by mandating that assistant coaches administer an influence for mental development to guide athletes to learn appropriately (Avilés et al., 2020). Emotional intelligence and managing adverse circumstances occur in numerous sporting situations (Laborde et al., 2018), and guiding student-athletes to behave adequately instills mental maturity and professionalism (Amado-Alonso et al., 2019). Additionally, assistant coaches have a primary role in instilling sport-related schematics within athletes to instruct fundamentals, organized approaches, and strategies for competition (Cushion et al., 2003). Mental development in sports is essential to achieving success in athletics to guide and enable athletes to execute responsibilities with predetermined objectivity (Carron et al., 2002). Preparing athletes for success requires mental development to guide athletes in administering the team's outlook and strategy (Woods et al., 2020). Coaches are critical for the athlete's development, and the HFC's constant presence and degree of influence carry the ability to enhance athletes' performance.

### **Leading Student-Athletes Academic Success**

College football players are responsible for performing in competitions while achieving good grades. Achieving academic success requires student-athletes to maintain athletic eligibility for competition (Mitten, 2022). Ensuring student-athletes are progressing toward graduating is a requirement for institutions, and Curs et al. (2022) reference the Academic Progress Rate (APR). The APR is essential to maintain legislation and avoid sanctions by ensuring student-athletes

graduate while pursuing collegiate athletics since the NCAA prioritizes it for graduate student-athletes (Curs et al., 2022). The HC guides student-athletes to attain scholastic success while developing and performing in sport-related responsibilities because of the challenge accompanying the lifestyle (Aries et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2013; Judge et al., 2018; Lopes Dos Santos et al., 2020; Navarro et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2008; Simons, 2000; Steele et al., 2020). Student-athletes are held accountable for academic success since all students are responsible for completing coursework (Comeaux, 2011). However, HCs play a role in helping create a strategic and practical approach to succeeding in higher education (Johnson et al., 2013).

Coaches use different strategies to lead to the team's academic success. Deciding the outcome of the team's academic progress rate (APR) and GPA dictates the impact and effectiveness of the HC leadership (Foster, 2017). College student-athletes have various levels of academic learning, and some do a better job managing schoolwork and athletic regimens (Hellas et al., 2018). The HC monitors, guides, and enables student-athlete's academic success rather than allowing athletes to struggle (Steele et al., 2020). HCs strategize approaches to lead student-athletes to succeed academically, such as requiring monitored study hall hours, providing an academic planner, and arranging meetings with an academic advisor. HCs may administer grade reports to monitor ongoing academic progress and ensure scholastic achievement (Hazzaa et al., 2018). Some students may need help to excel in the classroom. The HC has the authority, role, and responsibility to ensure all student-athletes achieve passing grades and progress toward graduating (Navarro et al., 2019). Student-athletes must progress towards achieving the declared degree promptly and pass the required courses to stay eligible for athletic participation (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2018). If student-athletes fail to maintain athletic eligibility, players cannot assist the team or participate in athletic-related activities (Huml et al., 2019). Ensuring

student-athletes maintain eligibility and progress towards graduating is a primary role of college HCs as determined by the NCAA (Chrabaszcz et al., 2018). How the HC leads the team academically influences the success or failure of the student-athletes' academic pursuits.

### **The College Coaching Industry**

Coaching in the NCAA supplies few opportunities to secure a job because of the limited number of institutional participants. Over one thousand National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member universities participate in athletics at Division 1 (D1), Division 2 (D2), and Division 3 (D3) levels, and over 500 compete in football (Baugh et al., 2020). Obtaining an exclusive paid coaching position on an NCAA football team welcomes various circumstances among coaching staff dynamics. Coaches can abuse power among fellow coaches and players, develop egotistical behaviors, and often have biases among hired coaches and favored players (Breger et al., 2019). Many HFCs use a series of networks to hire staff members, and college HFCs tend to hire former acquaintances. Many college football programs have assistant coaches who have some association with the head coach. The networking system in college athletics plays a crucial role in the development of the athletic coaching staff (Darvin, 2021). Many coaches are familiar with each other over the years of coaching, and relationships develop when individual coaches become familiarized with one another (Ramos et al., 2018). As a result, the most qualified candidate only sometimes gets hired as an assistant coach since the HC friends gain the opportunity. Consequential, heavily funded, and ideal institutional settings in college football are not winning because the coaching staff needs to develop and prepare athletes to outcompete opponents.

### ***Coaching for Success***

A winning season is ideal for any head coach because the devotion to winning a championship requires being a top-tier team. The HC is the chief source indicating a successful endeavor in competition (Omondi-Ochieng, 2019) and can be considered the essential determinant for success. The initiative of a head football coach enacts the development, preparedness, and guidance for student-athletes to achieve an elevated level of success (Leeds, 2020). Success is a relative achievement measured regarding wins/losses, winning percentage, and won championships. There are numerous approaches to leading a team to win games; some coaches are more successful in attaining wins than others. Some coaches correlate coaching philosophy and team culture to the approach to winning. Since coaching philosophy can carry room for bias (Williams, 2020), correlating the head coach's leadership approach with the impact on the team's outcome and culture heavily relies on the HFC (Sleeman, 2020). The variations and significant impact of the college football programs' culture are hardly studied, yet highly compensated coaches implement an ideal team environment to achieve optimal success. Defining the foundation, strategies, and philosophies behind HC team culture helps determine the impact on team success and if there are any faults in particular cultures.

### ***The Value of College Head Coaches***

Supply and demand are fundamental economic concepts that determine the price of goods and services (Aspromourgos, 2019). Proving the service as a college HFC involves an individual who seeks to instruct, guide, develop, prepare, and mentor student-athletes (Vaughan et al., 2021). Teams may achieve more wins directly from athletes executing responsibilities over opponents due to acquiring adequate coaching instruction. Institutions around the United States highly seek the demand for wins in college football and pursue effective HCs as the primary

factor in achieving outstanding success (Leeds, 2020). College HFCs earn extraordinary salaries, and schools with high demand for success seek a successful coaching philosophy and leadership strategies (Brook, 2021). With gargantuan conference earnings and alumni's financial support, some NCAA schools significantly fund college football programs to generate success (Oregon et al., 2019). The demand for college HFC is high. The supply is in continuous rotation until the institution's administrators find the right coach to acquire to achieve success. The termination of college HFC occurs when coaches do not achieve many vital wins, and mere success is a primary part of coaching retainment (Argentieri et al., 2019). A college HFC leadership style significantly influences the team's success, and many schools offer excessive compensation for those services.

### ***The Demand for a Winning Head Coach***

The position of a college head football coach is an exclusive job opportunity for the limited number of NCAA member universities that compete in football. College HFCs have a high turnover rate due to a heavy demand for winning (Bentzen et al., 2020). Wins determine success as a college HFC; if a coach continuously experiences exponential losses, the HC may be at risk of termination (Bryson et al., 2021). The Monday after the end of the college football season is often called black Monday due to the typical firings of head coaches. When athletic directors seek to terminate the HC, a sense of urgency in the firing and hiring process helps fill the vacancy to initiate new program development for a new head coach (Bryson et al., 2021). There are many candidates to choose from due to the demand for the HC position amongst numerous college divisions and extensive coaching staff at other NCAA member institutions (Wood, 2019). The power of being a college head football coach and the salary accompanying the role welcomes many applicants and potential hires that an athletic director selects. College

HFCs are among the highest-paid public employees in many states (Brook, 2021), and the extensive salaries support the demand for a winning coach. Suppose a college HFC is consistently not winning and is compensated six figures or higher. In that case, the HFC is in jeopardy of termination due to the expected leadership value of a successful HFC not being fulfilled and earning a college HFC contract designated to coaches that the athletic director feels confident to hire to lead a winning football program appropriately (Brook, 2021). A winning college football head coach carries immense value due to the income success generated within the department due to outstanding achievement. Identifying the leadership styles that enable a college HC to be successful in competition presents the blueprint to attain the value of a winning college football head coach.

### ***The Team Culture***

Many aspects of a sports team contribute to achieving outcomes. Aside from physical and mental development, team culture significantly impacts the head coach's leadership strategies (Cole, 2018). The culture within a sports team revolves around team attitudes, shared values, social norms, and a standard of habits that enables the conduct of team members (Cruickshank, 2012; Junggren et al., 2018; Lenartowicz, 2023; Strandbu et al., 2020). Head coaches verbalize critical aspects of the team's culture through slogans, phrases, and jargon to visually represent critical aspects of team customs and traditions for subconscious influence (Wagstaff, 2020). The HC and the coaching staff drive a team's culture by instilling good team-building characteristics that enable cohesion, increased effort, and coachability among team members (Lafrenière et al., 2011). The head football coach often credits success or failure to the teams' culture (Cole, 2018) because of the known impact culture has on team members' effort and attitude towards being developed, coached, and collaborating cohesively with fellow members (Vaughn et al., 2021).

An athletic program's culture can vary depending on the sport's nature, the vision and outlook of the coach's leadership, and the demographics of team members, all of which influence the culture of a given team (Watling, 2019). The HC vision implements the culture (Obal et al., 2020), while the team members help shape the organizational environment by expressing and adhering to cultural norms and standards (Kochanek, 2019). Cultivating a winning team culture requires continuous effort by all team members to instruct cultural values, demand adherence, and progress toward team goals (Kao et al., 2021).

### ***Success for Head Coaches***

A leadership style can be more appropriate than others depending on the setting and industry a leader is directing (Wells, 2013). Many factors contribute to the head coach's leadership style, and leadership strategies evolve throughout the years of experience. Determining the head football coach's success is consistently referenced by winning percentage and how many championships the HFC achieved. Success is a relative term, and Sutton et al. (2020) state that success focuses on achieving predestined goals and objectives. Head football coaches may find success outside of wins and championships, such as student academic success, team development, excess turnaround success, and even attending consolation "Bowl" games (Seifried et al., 2019). Non-athletic goals and achievements are commonly a part of a college football coach's preset goals, yet winning percentage and success within competition plays a vital role in the perspective of the head coaches' success (Arthur et al., 2017). Due to the impact of the head coach frequently winning in college football, athletic administrators seek a head coach who maintains an exceptional academic progress rate (APR) while achieving frequent wins and, ideally, a championship. All aspects of a college football program require leadership input by the head coach. Winning dictates the overall impact of the HFC while presenting the

influence the leader has on organizational outcomes (Omondi-Ochieng, 2019). Due to the winning success of the head coach, analyzing leadership styles determines how transformational leadership is used to achieve outstanding success.

### ***Authoritative Leadership in Coaching***

Many leadership theories can be administered to lead an organization to ideal success. Head coaches in athletics may be divided into which type of leadership style to use, and authoritative leadership is often utilized (Huang et al., 2021). Daniel Goleman contributed to the theory of authoritative leadership in the early 2000s. He emphasized the initiative and direct involvement of the leader to guide and prepare team members to reach predetermined goals (Zabolotniaia et al., 2019). Authoritative leadership enables leaders to guide followers directly while taking the initiative to address factors contributing directly and promptly to the overall success (Ahmed Iqbal et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2021; Kanwal et al., 2019; Tirmizi et al., 2019; Zabolotniaia et al., 2019). Authoritative HFCs can be successful, and determining a coach's leadership style presents methods and leadership theories.

Many college head coaches aim to develop a winning football program while leading athletes to academic success (Lordet al., 2020). Head football coaches utilize different leadership approaches and strategies to prepare the team to win. Each leadership style can potentially be an effective method for leading organizational success. Football is a full-contact sport where offensive or defensive schemes and physicality are essential to be developed within athletes. HCs use an authoritative leadership style to ensure team members adhere to the head coach's outlook. The role of the HC naturally infuses authoritative leadership due to the nature of inspiring athletes, developing coaches, and using leadership power to bring a group of individuals together to achieve ideal success (Ahmed Iqbal et al., 2021). The head football coach consistently



administers leadership styles, and effectiveness is unknown because overall research regarding head coach leadership input and outcomes is limited.

### ***Transactional Leadership in Coaching***

Leadership is vast and focuses on the industry; the setting can dictate the most beneficial leadership style. Transactional leadership uses an exchange or incentive method between the leader and the follower (Alrowwad, 2020). Introduced by 20th-century sociologist Max Webber, transactional leadership is a prominent theory that leads to organizational change and enables ideal achievement (Saad, 2019). Transactional leadership can be highly effective by presenting followers with an ultimatum that can result in a fortunate outcome or disciplinary action (Alrowwad, 2020; Cho et al., 2019; Gomes et al., 2020; Kanwal et al., 2019; Saad, 2019; Tirmizi et al., 2019). This reward-and-punishment style of leading is typical among college head coaches as an incentive for student-athletes to obey team rules, progress, perform athletically, and achieve scholastic success (Gomes et al., 2020). The transaction between the head coach and team members can be broad, and specificity is necessary to acknowledge the incentive in the transaction (Jensen et al., 2019). Various transactions could occur, such as a typical exchange among all student-athletes or within smaller groups, between the HC and staff members, and between student-athletes and assistant coaches. Transactional leadership could be perceived as threatening, where some members may feel taken advantage of and experience an alternative for ensuring productivity (Cho et al., 2019).

Head coaches may combine leadership styles that carry merit to administer the plan for leading the team to success. A head coach can utilize various leadership theories or combinations of styles to develop and guide the team. While each leadership style can be appropriate and effective, developing a strategic approach should utilize leadership theories properly and

efficiently rather than attempting to discover through trial and error. The HFC can develop a successful team by determining which leadership styles are most compatible with personal traits and perspectives.

### ***Utilizing Transformational Leadership in Coaching***

An organization's production is essential for program outcomes to meet predetermined goals and achieve objectives (Gagné, 2018). Transformational leadership was introduced by James Burns (1978) and reinforced by Bass (1995). This leadership theory administers the 4 I's, which puts direct emphasis on the concepts of influencing, inspiring, individually considering, and intellectually stimulating team members to lead organizational change and achieve team goals (Allen et al., 2016; Ausat et al., 2022; Bass, 1995; Berkovich, 2016; Boamah et al., 2018; Hickman, 2018; Liu, 2019; Udin, 2020). Transformational leadership is used among leaders in various industries and implements organizational change that relies on the initiative and guidance of the primary leader (Hickman, 2018). TL theory can often be mistaken for servant leadership (Udin, 2020), but the 4 I's distinguish this leadership method from others (Allen et al., 2016).

Transformational leadership theory is cohesive with a college head coach's role since it involves inspiring assistant coaches to create intrinsic motivation within themselves and the players while enabling an intellectual perspective of the game (Bass, 1995). Due to the vast amount of team members and each carrying a unique value for the team's conduction, the head coach creates an individualized relationship with each team member to relate to each coach and student-athlete. The role of a head coach is a primary determinant that enables this outcome. The head coach's initiative enacts most of the components of a college football program, and the strategy to develop the team leads to success, mediocrity, or failure. Alongside the athletic director, the head football coach is a prominent individual with primary judgment on hiring and

firing assistant coaches and staff members (Darvin, 2021). The responsibility of the HFC is to guide the assistant coaches because of the impact coordinators and position coaches have on administering the offensive and defensive schematics (Wang, 2021). The head coach develops, instructs, effectively communicates, and mentors the assistant coaches to instruct the players constructively and progressively (Stone et al., 2021).

The head coach designs the overview for the recruiting process that acquires student-athletes to join the program. Personality, skill level, and bodily measurables are all essential considerations during the recruiting process, but some HCs administer more tactical approaches to attain in-demand recruits. Some coaches enable the recruiting process to overspend to welcome recruits (Peng et al., 2018). Some coaches violate NCAA recruiting regulations due to eagerly trying to out-recruit fellow competitors, resulting in penalties, fines, and sanctions (Epstein, 2018; Evans, 2018; Flaherty, 2020; Nichols et al., 2020; Rascher et al., 2019). A college head coach obtains team members, infuses coaching philosophies into the team culture, and leads the program to attain outcomes. Fundamentals of TL depict the essence of the leader's role and provide an adequate foundation for leading a college football program.

Transformational leadership represents the leadership foundation of the HFC role and the dynamics the HC uses to complete essential responsibilities to achieve a winning team outcome ideally.

### **A College Football Head Coach Leading to Win**

Success is a relative status of accomplishment in many scenarios because of positive outcomes that occur in a spectrum of occurrences (Spurk et al., 2019). For example, a team that loses most of its games may still have success regarding team progress, academic achievement, and the safety and health of team members (Steca et al., 2018). The value placed on winning in

sports is a primary determinant of success because of the outstanding benefits of winning (Savić et al., 2018). The impact of winning as a college HFC comes with monetary incentives, enhanced sponsorships, and league payouts because of winning a substantial number of games and, ideally, a championship (Tabakovic, 2019). The outcome of a team's performance relies on the leadership initiative of the HFC to strategize and lead in developing and preparing the team members to outcompete the opponents (Humphreys et al., 2016). The HC is responsible for hiring a coaching staff and overseeing the conduction of all team members (Rathwell et al., 2014). The HFC initiates the strategy for athletes' development process due to the HC's overall influence on assistant coaches to teach, prepare, and inspire athletes to perform competitively (Rathwell et al., 2014).

Winning is a primary objective for any organized athletic program due to the nature of sports (Merkel, 2013), and winning outcomes benefit all team members (Pope, 2014). Winning tends to lead to more monetary earnings because of competing in high-profile games, attaining sponsorships, and receiving donations from those wanting to support and affiliate with a successful program (Horky, 2021). The income generated from winning excessively and being in a competitive league enables HCs to earn huge salaries (Sparvero, 2013). Paying HFCs a lavish salary is an investment for universities to cultivate a winning program by hiring a head coach who administers a successful leadership approach (Farmer, 2010). Winning percentage is a primary determinant of the head football coach's success and if leadership strategies are effective (Weight, 2015). The necessary components required to win in college sports rely on how effectively coaches develop athletes' skills and abilities and how the HC enables team members to work cohesively (Burgess, 2010).

Athletes should anticipate winning when being a part of an organized team because of the competitive nature of sports, with the ultimate objective being to defeat the opponent (Doucette et al., 2021). The influence of the coaching staff dictates the development and preparedness of each athlete, which determines the likelihood of winning (Gearity, 2011). Being a member of a winning team requires members to exemplify a level of excellence that defeats the opponent with a team effort (Doucette et al., 2021). Often, athletes can create a professional playing career or even associate with a sporting profession because of being athletically developed under a winning leadership initiative (Menke, 2019). The intrinsic feeling of winning is an outcome that highly competitive athletes desire (Jang et al., 2018). Winning is vital in sports; all partaking teams seek this outcome. The winning outcome benefits the institution, the athletic program, the HC, the coaching staff, the student-athlete, and the community (Elendu, 2017). The initiative and strategy of the HC's leadership style determine the standard for conducting the coaching staff and athletes, which depicts team outcomes and the achieved level of success (Macquet, 2021).

### **Summary**

Different leadership styles are depicted in the literature review, and each can be effective based on the industry and setting (Tirmizi et al., 2019). Understanding the head coach's method of leading team members can be determined by identifying the theories, styles, methods, and strategies of current HC leadership. Gaps in literature are evident regarding the roles and influence of college football coaching dynamics. Various subtopics in the literature review portray validity towards the head coach's role by identifying the related areas of knowledge affiliated with coaching college football and regarding the influence the HFC has on program achievement. Leadership strategies can be unknown to individuals outside the program, and a variety of gaps in literature need to be addressed with the present dynamics of a head coach's in-

depth leadership approach to guide the team to success. Although TL is the foundation of this study's theoretical framework due to the cohesiveness of this type of leadership with the college football industry, head coaches are a highly valued position, and the head football coaching salary is high (Swanson, 2020). This phenomenological study fills the gap in how specific college HFCs can attain a successful winning outcome and how leadership is applied to organizational achievement.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to describe and interpret the successful winning leadership approaches for college head football coaches (HFC). The following sub-sections depict the structure, approach, methods, and validity to conclude prosperous methods of leading a college football program in the outlook of transformational leadership (TL) theory. The research design depicts a hermeneutic phenological study that presents insight into the research structure. The hermeneutical framework of Van Manen (2016) is portrayed within the research design used in this research. Methods for data collection and analysis are presented, and interview and focus group questions are stated, along with a journal writing prompt. The interpretation of codes and developed themes legitimize successful styles of leading. Research validity and ethical considerations are presented in depth to exemplify the study's morality and the researcher's philosophical assumptions. Data analysis presents the method to discover optimal perspectives of a college HFC leadership style.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative approach effectively expresses a conclusive understanding of optimal leadership within a college football program (Kamal, 2019). Qualitative research is appropriate for issues incorporated with direct personal experience with the objective of the depth of knowledge of external observable behavior (Husserl, 2012). The qualitative design provided an excellent approach to naturalistic data to conclude the phenomena involving successful leadership among college HFCs. Various research designs are administered through qualitative research, such as case studies, grounded theory, and phenomenology. This research design used qualitative phenomenology to discover and interpret winning leadership styles among successful

head college football coaches.

The concept of phenomenology, as presented by Max Van Manen (2016), is the unique focus of this qualitative research. In this context, phenomenology exemplifies qualitative research by discovering and interpreting lived experiences from a specific sample (Van Manen, 2016). This unique perspective, rooted in the works of Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer, has led to the current research utilization (Lincoln, 1990). Max Van Manen's expression of hermeneutic phenomenology through existential life, expanding the roots of Husserl and Gadamer (Burkoski et al., 2019), is a unique contribution to the field. The use of phenomenology in this research study to obtain lived experiences from winning college football head coaches and discover practical methods to lead a college football program is a novel approach. Researching a phenomenological topic enables the discovery and interpretation of the participants' lived experiences, increasing a specific field of knowledge (Van Manen, 2016). The lived experiences of winning college HFCs are a phenomenon that has many gaps in the literature, and this study helps present critical knowledge regarding leading a winning college football program.

Hermeneutic and transcendental are two types of phenomenological research, and this study utilized hermeneutic phenomenology. The thoroughness of this research is evident in the choice of hermeneutic phenomenology, a framework that refers to the researcher's expertise being derived from a relatable affiliation to the phenomenon (Van Manen, 2016). The premise of the hermeneutic phenomenology framework is the ability to discover and interpret lived experiences in human behavior through epistemology and the theory of interpretation (Van Manen, 2021). Van Manen distinguishes hermeneutic phenomenology by going beyond the philosophical approaches to research and seeking the phenomenon's direct experiences (Van Manen, 2021). The validity of hermeneutic phenomenology is stressed by the researcher's critical



insights and by containing the inner perspective of the topic's organization (Van Manen, 2016). This thorough and rigorous approach presents specifics of lived experience that conclude a greater understanding of a topic due to direct affiliation with the studied industry (Alsaigh, 2021). Qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology can highlight the common themes that present a unique outlook for research (Lefebvre, 2021). This qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research design was the structure and perspective during research.

## **Research Questions**

### **Central Research Question**

What are the lived experiences of winning college HFCs leadership initiatives?

### **Sub-Question One**

How do winning college HFCs describe interactions with staff members and athletes?

### **Sub-Question Two**

How do winning college HFCs explain initiatives for influencing staff members and athletes?

### **Sub-Question Three**

How do winning college HFCs ensure preparation among staff members and athletes?

### **Sub-Question Four**

How do winning college HFCs describe how to stimulate staff members and athletes intellectually?

## **Setting and Participants**

This study collected phenomenological data through online settings and utilized winning college head football coaches as the participants in the sample. An adequate setting is essential to obtain qualified, willing participants to coordinate availability between coaches and the

researcher (Tong et al., 2019). The research setting is developed to obtain numerous participants and data safely and reasonably. Obtaining qualified participants and conducting research in an appropriate setting provided the sources for data and was oriented around the lived experiences of winning college head football coaches.

### **Setting**

The primary sample involves college HFCs, and data collection occurred through online web meetings. The web source used to collect data for participant feedback was Microsoft Teams due to the proven convenience and reliability of communicating in past qualitative research (Archibald et al., 2019). Winning college head football coaches are an exclusive sample throughout the United States, and qualified HCs may be unable to participate in in-person interviews. College HFCs are also very time-consuming individuals whose schedules can be hectic, and online meetings provide convenience for participation in the study. An online setting enabled data collection from an exclusive sample by working around the coach's convenience while initiating a professional engagement.

### **Participants**

This study's participants are college HFCs competing in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The NCAA oversees all collegiate athletics that is a member in any of the three divisions and provides governance for organized competition (Epstein, 2018). Each participant was a male whose ages ranged from thirty-six to sixty, competed in the NCAA, and had different ethnicities. Thirteen qualified head coaches were sample participants, and it was substantial to reach saturation. Saturation occurred when data collection began with redundant feedback from participant responses, and no further coding or conclusions were made (Fusch, 2015; Saunders et al., 2018). The sample was recruited over three months, during which all

thirteen HFCs were obtained. The study used a criterion-based sample due to the winning percentage requirement for HFCs to participate (McCombes, 2022). The sample was sought based on the success of the winning percentage achieved over the last three seasons as head coach. Head coaches with a winning percentage in the top fifty percentile in each conference over the last three years were requested to participate in the study. For confidentiality, participants' winning percentages were not made public. By utilizing criterion-based sampling, successful coaches' leadership styles were in conjunction. A thorough review of each participant before being chosen ensured that each coach partaking in the study met the eligibility guidelines.

### **Recruitment Plan**

The criterion-based sample was the primary participant acquisition source in the research, and proper HFCs were essential to produce rich data and key findings (Lincoln, 1986). College HFCs were used for this study's primary sample until participant saturation. Qualified participants were current college HFCs, competed in the NCAA, and had been an HFC for the last three years, and the last three-year winning percentage as HFC ranked in the top half of the conference. A three-year winning percentage in the top half of their college conference competition validated the HFC perspective for successful leadership and reinforced the initiative to develop a winning program. The qualifying winning percentage did not include the 2021 COVID-19 season due to the lack of participation of all teams and the lack of a natural playing season influenced by COVID-19 restrictions. University websites presented a brief biography of HFCs' experiences, past winning records, and a timeline that influenced the achieved winning percentage.

Contacting each HFC that met the research qualifications through email to obtain participation in the study enabled higher probabilities for an adequate sample size. The email

presented my biography, the research topic, consent, and the procedures that took place if the participants were willing to take part in the study. The research description was expressed in the consent form for the participants to review research parameters and expressed what was needed for participant involvement. Many qualified HFCs also recruited the sample at a national coaching convention. Snowballing also generated much of the participants' involvement. Qualified HFCs were willing to partake in the study through these recruitment avenues.

The perspective of leading a college football program was unique, and leadership styles had merit, and each HFC participation presented groundbreaking knowledge into the football coaching industry. Patton (2015) signifies a criterion-based purposeful sample to attract diverse yet qualified participants that applied to the research topic. By discovering and interpreting data from the sample, winning styles of leading were identified by ensuring each participant met the qualifications for the study. Each participant in the study had no past or present engagement or affiliation with the researcher and eliminated conflict of interest and biases. Obtaining a sample composed of winning college HFCs identified how winning is influenced by how a head coach administers leadership among team members.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

This research study is essential to providing vital elements of effective leadership strategies that winning college head coaches use to provide proven leadership methods for current and future head coaches. Understanding my position as a researcher is essential for this study to portray my motives and outlook. This section explains the interpretive framework, which consists of social constructivism. The philosophical assumptions present the researcher's positionality and consist of views regarding the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, which express the researcher's viewpoint in this hermeneutic phenomenological

study.

### **Interpretive Framework**

The research lens for this phenomenon followed the framework of social constructivism. Introduced by Vygotsky, social constructivism enables me to obtain a consensus of data to identify a newfound understanding of the studied sample (Matthews, 2021). Social constructivism enabled research initiatives to obtain critical data, present essential leadership concepts, and identify successful leadership approaches (Gaus et al., 2022). This research paradigm allowed me to create and organize data and create a conclusive basis for ideal leadership practices among college HFCs (Brieger et al., 2020). Social constructivism was utilized throughout the research to obtain the most valuable leadership perspective with insight from relatable experiences supported by proven success in winning games.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

Each component of the philosophical assumption enables a base set of values to exemplify the researcher's validity and perspective, which shape the study. The ontological, epistemological, and axiological values can be challenging for some to understand, but the impact of each assumption presents the reader with foundational principles that shaped the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The philosophical assumption supported the research process regarding college HFC leadership theories and styles while promoting the researcher's philosophical perceptions (Bleiker et al., 2019).

#### ***Ontological Assumption***

The ontological assumption presents the reality of the researcher's truth and understanding while conducting this qualitative study and presents insight into existential beliefs on behalf of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ontology helps portray an understanding of

the researcher's foundational background within the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My experience of being a D1 college football player has enabled me to achieve my bachelor's and graduate degrees while participating in college football. My lived experiences as a college football student-athlete are a direct precursor to my career pursuit as a college football coach and to achieve my doctoral degree. My ontological status is founded on my Christian faith because of the impact of the Lord, who enables bountiful opportunities in highly conscious existence. Most humans are born with the capacity of a typical working mentality, and the Lord gifted us with a sense of higher consciousness. The ontological assumption accompanies phenomenological research because it describes and interprets data on the researcher's behalf. By understanding the researcher's ontological stance, readers can decipher applicable biases through the study and the correlating findings. My life endeavors are founded on the teachings of the Lord, and this research attempts to fulfill His works by offering enhanced methods to lead youths in an athletic setting that can pay dividends to impact the well-being of team members' lives. The objective of identifying the different unique leadership styles HCs utilized helped determine which leadership tendencies are valuable for guiding a winning college football program while portraying the impact of the Lord on the lives of those who seek betterment.

### ***Epistemological Assumption***

The epistemological assumption focuses on how the ontological assumption can be supported and justified for credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Identifying the researcher's associations with the study further depicts an analogous knowledge component (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My life's timeline has led me to my current circumstances, conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological affiliated with a career field I am pursuing. To obtain data, only coaches with a winning percentage that ranks in the top half of the conference were used for the

success findings. Interviews enable the interpretation of data using direct quotes from the participant's responses. The concept of lived experiences within each participant is discovered and interpreted solely by direct meanings from each response and incorporated into the past, present, and future settings for head coaching leadership methods. The epistemological assumption exemplifies the credible and relatable knowledge on behalf of the participants and the researcher to support continued input in the college football industry. I coached at D1 Intuition as a position coach in the NCAA and did not accept any participant with whom I am affiliated.

### ***Axiological Assumption***

The axiological assumption refers to the scientific basis that supports the ontological assumption of the researcher and the topic of interest that presents relatable and reliable research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My research values originate from my career pursuit to be a head football coach, while my life perspective is based on a Christian foundation. As a current D1 assistant coach, I am familiar with the college football departments, including the team members involved in organizational conduction. The influence the Lord has had on life is supported through metaphysics. Metaphysics consists of the philosophy of the non-material world that attempts to understand what is conceived as the unseen (Hofweber, 2018). The axiological assumption provides critical insight into the researcher's affiliated background to support further reliability in interpreting data within HFC leadership styles (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I have directly played and worked under HFCs who were power-driven, unethical and needed more quality leadership traits to develop and adequately prepare student-athletes. I experienced coaches who abused their power, micromanaged most situations, expressed negativity regularly, and personified nepotism and favoritism. I strive to present a firm understanding of how a

winning HFC leads team members to be cultivated to obtain prosperous outcomes. Enhancing current and future coaches' leadership methods will increase the quality of college HFCs, particularly within the NCAA.

### **Researcher's Role**

The value of the researcher's role was essential to conduct a meaningful and credible study by ensuring all research phases are completed appropriately (Malmqvist et al., 2019). I have been a college football coach since 2019 and have played college football at the Division 1 and Division 2 levels. My role as a researcher is to discover and interpret the lived experiences of winning college HFCs, and my past experiences provide a hermeneutic approach to complete research. When I played college football at the D1 and D2 levels, I obtained a perspective of different head coaches and their leadership styles. I realized there are many methods to lead a college football program, and not all leadership styles are effective. I experienced coaches who abused power, condescending to players and coaches, and lacked effective leadership to enable a winning season outcome. My experiences as a student-athlete led to my career endeavor as a college football coach. I have coached at junior college, D2, and the D1 levels, and my experiences as a college coach and a student-athlete have led to the concerning understanding that many head coaches need to lead effectively to enable a winning team outcome. I have witnessed head coaches blame the athlete for making excuses, exhibiting disorganization, and failing to put the student-athlete at the heart of the decision. Many team members sometimes scrutinize the head coach and question the head coach's leadership ability.

My experiences have encouraged me to discover how winning college head coaches lead a football program to achieve a winning team outcome. I have witnessed many leadership methods on how not to lead as a college football head coach, and the question of how a winning



head coach leads presents a blueprint to lead effectively as a college head coach. I am currently a D1 assistant football coach, and I do not have any past or present affiliation with research participants. I am mindful of the dynamics of a college football program, the tendencies of the HFC, and the various leadership styles used by college HFCs. My biases are derived from my involvement as a current assistant coach, and hermeneutic phenomenology was selected to discover leadership styles among winning college HFCs due to my knowledge and experience in the football coaching industry (Van Manen, 2016). Using hermeneutic phenomenology, my data collection questions are developed to obtain a perspective of leadership specific to college football. The leadership areas required by college HFCs are being questioned within interviews and focus groups. By knowing the key elements necessary to cultivate a competitive college football, the hermeneutic design enables me to discover and interpret the essential leadership styles winning head coaches administer to develop a winning football team. Data coding and theme development are derived from the direct responses from the participants, but my interpretation is founded on my knowledge of coaching college football.

Obtaining the sample, designing data collection methods, and documenting and interpreting data developed findings toward identifying effective HFC leadership (Malmqvist et al., 2019). My perspective as a D1 football assistant coach welcomed the hermeneutic phenomenological approach and enabled appropriate data collection questions and analysis aided by my career experiences. I carried no bias towards any data collected since the coaches' winning percentage was the qualifying factor behind HFC participation. My role as a researcher is vital to producing and contributing rich data while ensuring ethical research.

### **Procedures**

The research process that involves the lived experiences of HFCs provides insight into

strategic and successful approaches to leading a winning college football team. Despite the distance, numerous methods exist to obtain and collect phenomenological data (Lobe et al., 2020). Data collection triangulation uses interviews, focus groups, and journal writing prompts to get a reliable data pool. Data collection approaches, methods of analysis, and dynamics of each technique within triangulation are stated in order of interviews, focus groups, and protocol writing.

### **Data Collection Plan**

Obtaining research permissions is essential to express the necessary approvals to begin research and acquire participants. The procedure to begin research required permission from committee members and approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Before beginning research, a strategic approach to obtaining participants and the required permissions is presented to understand parameters and requirements. Permissions are stated in chronological order to offer step-by-step procedures to administer data collection methods. A recruitment plan exhibits how the participants are thoroughly briefed and made aware of research methods to obtain consent to participate in the study. Attaining the necessary permissions enabled the sample members to be recruited to conduct phenomenological research.

### **Individual Interviews**

The initial and primary form of data collection was interviews. The sample containing college HFCs was the primary part of the interview to obtain in-depth perspectives on winning leadership practices. Personal interviews served as a source of data to get insight into leadership approaches and collect qualitative data about the topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Individual interviews were an excellent qualitative research method that enabled the researcher to understand winning college football head coaching leadership styles (McGrath et al., 2019). The

interviews for each participant were the primary data source. Interviews took place through Microsoft Teams for the convenience of the participants. Interview questions and documentation worksheets were predetermined to strategically obtain the most valuable data within the time with each participant. These interviews enabled a thorough understanding of the lived experiences of each coach's perspective, which created a conclusive understanding of numerous winning leadership strategies. Exploring this phenomenon emphasized Van Manen's phenomenological theory by reproducing the current HCs' leadership styles through a comprehensive breakdown (Van Manen, 2021). The following subsection presents the interview questions asked by each participant, which are also located in Appendix D.

**Table 1**

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*Individual Interview Questions*

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1. Please describe the coaching history that led you to your current HFC position. CRQ
2. What are some methods by which you prepare and inspire student-athletes to meet team expectations? SQ3
3. How would you describe your influence on your assistant coach's team member interactions? SQ2
4. How would you describe the approach your assistant coaches should influence student-athletes? SQ2
5. What methods do you administer to inspire staff members and coaches to execute your program outlook? SQ3
6. Please explain the primary team departments that require your leadership input. CRQ
7. Please describe and explain the concept of goal setting in your leadership. CRQ
8. How does your influence shape the culture of your team? SQ2

9. Please explain how the team culture inspires team members. SQ3
10. Please describe how your leadership influences the staff members' behavior and conduct.  
SQ1
11. What is your leadership towards developing and preparing student-athletes? SQ1
12. What is your coaching philosophy regarding teaching, developing, and preparing student-athletes for success? SQ4
13. Please describe the influence of your leadership practices that have contributed to a winning team outcome. CRQ
14. Please explain the significance of leadership for winning as a college HFC. CRQ
15. What procedures do you follow to manage unfortunate team member circumstances?  
SQ1
16. How has your leadership shaped your delivery as an HFC? CRQ

To begin the interview with an understanding of the origin of a coach's leadership outlook, question 1 explores the background of the participant's coaching history. While question two focuses on desired results, questions three and four seek to determine how assistant coaches guide student-athletes at the HFCs' discretion. Understanding how assistant coaches teach student-athletes is significant since athlete development relies on the instruction of assistant position coaches. Question five seeks insight into which departments within a college football program rely on the HFCs leadership structure. This question determines the extensive avenues leaders must oversee to guide team members to prevail rather than leading others to fail (Bass, 1995). These questions aim to depict predeterminations that cultivate a winning team by identifying the influence of the HFC leadership on optimal team development.

Question six signifies the effect of team goals while identifying origins and how goal setting plays a role in achieving success. Goal setting is a primary tool for achievement (Letham, 2020), and methods to create goals helped to understand visualized achievements. Question seven seeks to determine how the HC directly influences the team's culture and why it is essential to cultivate an ideal organizational environment (Burt et al., 2022). Question eight correlates team culture with player inspiration and the influence that led to a winning environment. The impact assistant coaches have influences athletes' production, and questions nine and ten identify how the HFC enables and enhances assistant coaches' conduct. Question nine dives deeper into how the head coach directly influences primary factors for the team's success regarding areas involving recruiting, practice outlook, and the functionality of the offense and defense.

Coaches are teachers, and the method by which assistant coaches instruct players develops the skills and abilities of the student-athlete while preparing athletes for competitive success (Kinnerk et al., 2018). Question ten addresses how the head coach leads assistant coaches and staff members to behave appropriately to develop and teach athletes as effectively as possible. Question eleven attempts to understand how a college HFC enables athletes to be taught, developed, and prepared to execute responsibilities against opponents. Coaching philosophy is sought in question twelve and aims to seek how HFCs expect position coaches to train student-athletes. Winning determines success as a college HFC Brown-Devlin (2020), and questions thirteen and fourteen seek the HC to correlate personal leadership practices to winning percentage. By doing so, signifying the input of the HFC leadership initiative becomes an influential source for team success. Question fifteen attempts to understand how winning coaches manage team members' issues. Many unfortunate circumstances arise in a college

football program, and how the HFC manages those issues can lead to either resolved cases or poor handling of the problem, creating liability. The last question sums up the approach of the HFC as a leader. The extent of leadership as a college HFC enables team members to conduct the HC vision to evolve into a winning football program and hopefully win a championship.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups conjoin the participants' input by incorporating shared discussions, individual experiences, and perspectives regarding leadership approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Focus groups encouraged HFCs to engage in leadership-oriented discussions by gathering the HFCs together to generate data collection, which consists of ideas, perspectives, agreeance, or even disagreement (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Gathering numerous college HFCs together encouraged coaches to discuss personal leadership methods, and unforeseen leadership scenarios arose due to the open-ended discussion (Amore et al., 2019). The focus group discussion consisted of four participants who were selected from among qualified participants. The participants from the FCS and D2 were chosen to participate in focus group data collection. Three head coaches from D2 and one head coach from the FCS participated in the focus group. Different leadership methods were derived from the discussions by proposing different outlooks. Considering this potentiality, valuable phenomenological data were obtained by analyzing the responses and perspectives of head coaches who administered unique leadership styles. The focus group took place virtually through Microsoft Teams for the convenience of the HFCs and enabled the exclusive sample to coordinate a time to participate in the discussion. Each focus group question below presented concepts that addressed the central research question and sub-research questions and were designed to obtain open-ended responses. Focus group questions are presented below in Table 2 and in Appendix E.

**Table 2***Focus Group Questions*

- 
1. Explain your direct leadership outlook when developing a winning program. CRQ
  2. Describe the coaching philosophy for you and your positional coaches when developing student-athletes. SQ4
  3. Describe methods for winning consistently in a college football program. CRQ
  4. Please describe some effective team member motivational strategies. SQ3
  5. Explain the methods used to prepare and inspire your assistant coaches to administer an ideal standard of coaching. SQ3
  6. Please describe how you prepare and inspire student-athletes to be coached while maintaining enthusiasm. SQ2
  7. Describe how you lead different facets within the football program about the practice plan. SQ3
  8. Please explain how often you meet with your assistant coaches and what you discuss. SQ1
  9. Please explain how often you meet with your student-athletes and what you discuss. SQ1
  10. If you could share one piece of advice for a college HFC, what would it be? CRQ

The first focus group question focuses on which aspects of a college football program are essential and requires direct leadership efforts by the head coach. There are many facets in a college football program, and determining the role the head football coach plays a significant leadership role presents priority responsibilities. Question two focuses on HFC leadership philosophy while presenting the HC outlook for assistant coaches' philosophy due to the impact on player interactions. The method for winning in question three seeks to obtain perspectives that

tie directly into the central research question. Questions four and five attempt to make ties with student-athletes and assistant coaches for a strategy to win. Since players and coaches enable performance during competition, motivating both member groups is a significant component of winning college football.

Question six continues to evaluate the HFCs' input toward enhancing athlete development while maintaining or even enhancing player ambition and enthusiasm. Question seven refers to the CRQ back into the focus group discussion by seeking the entire outlook of the HFC leadership approach among vital facets for program conduction involving recruiting, the practice plan, and offensive and defensive schemes. Questions eight and nine determine how often the participants engage in meetings with team members and what discussion occurs. Question ten summarizes the focus group discussion by having each participant explain an impactful leadership strategy based on valuable experiences. Sharing advice is excellent for the HCs to share amongst each other while offering data towards the HFC leadership method. These focus group questions enable the participants to interact with each other and discuss in-depth leadership methods and strategies.

### **Protocol Writing Prompt**

Hermeneutic phenomenology consists of obtaining actual portrayals of lived experiences from those directly involved with a phenomenon (Van Manen, 2021). Aside from the interviews and the focus group discussion, a protocol writing prompt was administered to obtain a genuine perspective of the HFC leadership phenomenon (Van Manen, 2016). The sample was provided with a writing prompt topic to complete a two-hundred-to-five-hundred-word response regarding a leadership experience that contributed to a winning team outcome. By participating in the protocol writing, the HCs reflected on past experiences that were depicted through current



recollections to interpret phenomenological input by the researcher (Van Manen, 2016). Data sources provided critical insights into the lived experiences and personal narratives of HFC's leadership theories and how leadership was applied (Van Manen, 2016). By collecting a first-person data source through protocol writing, the analysis presented legitimacy within phenomenological data and expanded the collected data pool. Table 3 below states the protocol writing prompt, which is also located in Appendix F.

**Table 3***Protocol Writing Prompt*

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Please write in 250-500 words that describe a leadership experience that has contributed to a winning team.

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**Data Analysis**

When analyzing the interview data, a recording and transcription on Microsoft Teams were completed for each interview to retrieve every word the participant expressed when addressing each question. The selective approach for data analysis was conducted to specifically review individual transcription multiple times to discover and interpret the lived leadership experiences among each participant (Van Manen, 2016). The complete transcription for each interview was reviewed and reread to identify commonalities in responses and determine codes for leadership analysis. A spreadsheet used on Microsoft Excel was used to organize participant information and data collection feedback to conveniently review data. Data was stored on an external hard drive for privacy concerns.

Van Manen (2016) emphasizes how phenomenological interview data can be categorized into codes under themes representing key leadership aspects. Coding occurs when similar data is gathered among multiple participants, where overlapping information is generated into categories or codes (Van Manen, 2016). Using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, codes were columnized to organize responses under other discussion points with similar tendencies. After data was coded and analyzed, themes were derived from the focal point or the distinct and specific commonalities identified in the codes. Themes are specific and are developed through coding synthesis to discover and interpret the phenomenological data from each head football coach. The themes and codes obtained through interviews depict personalized aspects of successful college HFC leadership styles and identify effective winning leadership characteristics. The analysis enabled new findings on which leadership styles are more effective and common among winning college football coaches.

The focus group discussion and a complete recording and transcription occurred on Microsoft Teams to discover and interpret the leadership perspectives expressed during the meeting. Microsoft Teams was the setting to host, record, and transcribe the focus group discussion. Focus group answers, agreements, disagreements, and related perspectives underwent thematic analysis for coding. Selective coding was categorized on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to be further interpreted to derive themes. The complete recording and transcription on Microsoft Teams were reread to identify discussion points thoroughly. Coding, theme development, and researcher interpretation presented focus group data that portrays HFC leadership practices supported by fellow successful HCs (Van Manen, 2021). The collective feedback was categorized and coded based on key aspects, commonalities, and differences that presented unique perspectives winning HFC leadership styles. Themes were derived from codes to specify

further data supporting or dismissing leadership effectiveness's legitimacy (Van Manen, 2021). Thematic analysis discovered the variables in the focus group codes to interpret HFC phenomenology.

I utilized the holistic approach for focus group data analysis. The holistic approach allowed data to be analyzed together, where phrases and paragraphs were generated in codes (Van Manen, 2016). The perspectives and discussions shared within the focus groups presented unforeseen perspectives due to the collaborated effort to converse regarding leading as a college HFC (Krueger & Casey, 2001). Various responses arose during focus group discussions, such as data reinforcement, contradictory ideologies, differentiating or similar perspectives, and brainstorming new leadership methods. By interpreting the themes developed from focus group data, the lived experiences of the participants' leadership styles were concluded (Van Manen, 2016).

Protocol writing responses were uploaded into Microsoft Excel for data analysis. By having the participants depict documented prior lived experiences, head coaches presented perspectives of leadership methods that supported and contradicted current styles of leading (Van Manen, 2021). Each writing prompt was thoroughly read to identify all significant components of the participant's phenomenological depiction. The detailed approach was used to analyze protocol writing and identify any valuable data expressed by each participant (Van Manen, 2016). The detailed approach led to commonalities that were coded. Protocol writing codes sought theme development, and compelling leadership aspects of a winning college HFC were determined. By doing so, past leadership methods were compared to current practices to identify and interpret the most successful leadership strategies. At the same time, it presented the evolution of their winning style of leading.

### **Trustworthiness**

The level of research reliability depends on the trustworthiness expressed through the nature of a given study (Lincoln, 1986). Approaches to ensure trustworthiness range from many strategies to depict the trustworthiness to the participants naturally, committee members, and potential readers (Lincoln, 1986). A sense of trust is required to legitimize the data obtained through interviews, surveys, and protocol writing regarding college HFCs' winning leadership styles. Cho et al. (2019) depicted trustworthiness as an essential component and categorized the primary attributes of trustworthiness under security, reliability, persistence, and agility. The purpose of conducting a study is to portray and exemplify helpful knowledge to a particular sector (Brooks et al., 2019), and trustworthiness within the research legitimizes the study's general nature (Lincoln, 1986).

### **Credibility**

Guba and Lincoln (1990) posit that credibility provides fair value and dependability among the researcher and the procedural operations. Prolonged engagement and triangulation are two methods that obtain diverse sources for data collection that provide rich data collection. Prolonged engagement occurred throughout the interview progress and credibility through member checking. Member checking ensured all participants presented value to the study while meeting the qualifications to participate (Lincoln, 1986). Researching the lived experiences of winning college HFCs used transformational leadership as a theoretical framework due to its relevancy and application to coaching college sports.

Triangulation was another technique used to present credibility for leadership data because of the multiple data sources (Noble, 2019). Triangulation enabled the three data collection methods to generate themes that relate to each other and present the most valuable

data. Incorporating data obtained through interviews, the focus group, and journal writing prompts presented adequate credibility regarding obtaining perspectives of the head coach's leadership styles and methods. Data was stored through a password-protected external hard drive for confidentiality and was organized into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Throughout the research, different forms of data analysis created exceptional credibility for the collected data.

### **Transferability**

Due to overlapping organizational characteristics, transferability enabled current research to be replicated (Lincoln, 1986). By analyzing and concluding the ideal tendencies of teaching a college football program, HFCs from other sports can apply identified leadership styles and personal leadership methods. Non-athletic organizational leaders could adopt winning leadership styles a successful coach may use appropriately. There are extensive leadership aspects within a college football program a head coach must oversee, and the college coaching setting can present areas of organizational leadership that can apply to various industries. Different sources of leadership are correlated to leadership among winning college HFCs, and replicating research supports credibility and similar results. Organizational leadership was credited as a primary factor for group success, and this research is impactful for head coaches of different sports and leaders in non-athletic career fields (Ausat et al., 2022).

### **Dependability**

The dependability factor is relative but was consistent among different samples. Lincoln and Guba (1986) defend the necessity for qualitative research, arguing that the dependability data obtained and analyzed are specific to the participating coaches. A primary method to present research dependability is an inquiry audit. Guba and Lincoln (1990) emphasize that the inquiry audit presents an unbiased perspective of the research produced and a dependable assurance that

the research is reliable. Research dependability is expressed through a fellow researcher's unbiased perspective of data collection questions, obtaining qualified participants, and creating codes and themes solely based on transcribed data. The research process is defined in-depth to depict the dependability of data obtained and the corresponding analysis.

### **Confirmability**

Initially, I stated my biases and researcher positionality to express my status as the researcher. Research began when Liberty University IRB approval was granted. Audit trails and triangulation were two primary ways to present the most trustworthy study. Audit trails presented a checklist-like depiction of the whole research process, the nature of the data obtained, and how conclusions were being developed (Carcary, 2020). Utilizing audit trails is common in qualitative research. Carcary (2020) emphasized the use of audit trails for confirmability and trustworthiness when stating, “Confirmability involves maintaining an audit of all key stages and theoretical, methodological, and analytical decisions, as well as documenting how a researcher’s thinking evolves throughout a research project” (p.166). In addition, triangulation assisted in research validity since multiple methods were used to obtain data, such as interviews, the focus group, and protocol writing prompts. Data collection methods provided the pool of data that was coded and themed. Audit trails and triangulation ensured the confirmability of the trustworthiness of this research.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This research had many ethical considerations since the sample is the study's primary data source. Guba and Lincoln (1990) highly prioritized ethical considerations since trustworthiness relies on the ethical initiative of a researcher’s design. Participant consent was expressed in terms of confidentiality, research access, voluntary nature of the study, data

collection process, and external data usage. To further consider the privacy of each participant, an alias was assigned for each member to protect the identity of each head coach. Ethical considerations in research presented a sense of trustworthiness between the researcher and participant, and Artal (2017) stresses the importance when stating, “Research protocols should achieve maximum benefits for the society, have clinical and scientific value, be subject to independent review, respect human dignity, and follow the principles of informed consent, and most importantly, subjects should have complete autonomy” (p.107). Data is stored for five years on a private external hard drive to ensure data confidentiality and is kept in a private location. Honesty and research with an ethical outlook were essential for this study to exhibit reliable, credible, and trustworthy approaches for data collection, analysis, and findings.

### ***Permissions***

Submitting a request to Liberty University’s International Review Board (IRB) for research approval occurred before starting any research. After the IRB approval, signed consent from each participating head coach was obtained from the exclusive sample. Each coach received documented consent disclosure for review and agreement to participate. Ensuring all IRB permissions are granted and that the participant agreement presents ethical and valid research procedures. The participants were made aware of the required input, dynamics of research conduction, and the dynamic role the researcher and participants fulfill in this study.

### ***Other Participant Protections***

When the sample was recruited, they were informed that participation was voluntary, and the consent form expressed how no compensation would be provided. The sample participated solely based on their will to cooperate with the study's methodology. The sample also was informed verbally that they could stop data collection at any point and withdraw from the study.

The confidentiality of the participants was ensured using pseudonyms, and data collection occurred in a setting where no other persons were present other than the HFC and the researcher. The collected data was stored on a password-protected computer and will be deleted in under three years. Participants could enhance their leadership strategies by taking part in the study. Methods such as self-evaluation and reinforcements likely could occur when discussing leadership strategies.

### **Summary**

Chapter Three presents the research design using hermeneutic phenomenology, followed by the central and sub-research questions. The setting was Microsoft Teams, and the participants were college HFCs with a proven winning record in the last three years. Data analysis occurred using the hermeneutical phenomenology research framework posited by Van Manen (2016). Data collection methods included recorded and transcribed interviews, a focus group discussion, and protocol writing prompt responses. Van Manen's (2016) framework, which consisted of selective, detailed, and holistic approaches to the analysis, was utilized. Trustworthiness presents validity, credibility, dependability, and confirmability within research methodology. Effective methods to lead as a college HFC were discovered and interpreted by researching the dynamics of winning leadership strategies.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

This hermeneutical phenomenology study was designed to discover and interpret the lived experiences of winning college HFC's leadership initiatives. Data analysis was completed using the hermeneutical framework posited by Van Manen (2019). The participants' perspectives and responses are provided in the results section of this chapter. The answers to each research question are discussed using the thematic findings discovered during data collection. Various charts and graphs are shown to present the data. The chapter also concludes with a chapter summary of what has been discovered.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were college head football coaches who currently coach within the National Collegiate Athletic Association. The participants were recruited by criterion-based sampling, and later, snowball sampling was utilized. Aliases were used to protect each participant's identity and uphold complete confidentiality. Thirteen participants were recruited for this study. Three participants coach at the Division 1 Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS). Four participants coach at the Division 1 (D1) Football Conference Subdivision (FCS). Six participants coach at the Division 2 (D2) level. Coaches from the Division 3 (D3) level were not recruited for this study. Four HFCs participated in the focus group discussion. One of the twelve interviewees did not submit a response to the writing prompt. Malcolm was the sole HFC who only participated in the focus group discussion. The HFCs were from ten different NCAA conferences ranging from the FBS to D2. No HFCs from conferences in the western United States participated in the study. Refer to Table 4 and Appendix G for participant information.

**Jim**

Jim has been a head coach at the Division 1 level for over ten years. He takes pride in developing student-athletes fundamentally. During his head coaching pursuit, he has won multiple conference championships. Jim's leadership exemplifies success, and he has proven to achieve wins at the Football Conference Subdivision (FCS). Jim is an HFC in the Ohio Valley Conference.

**Daniel**

Daniel is a profound head coach with many coaching accolades. He has coached at numerous levels of football and has a history of success leading as a college HFC. He has extensive experience and has been to numerous Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) bowl games. Daniel exhibits leadership professionalism in all spectrums. Daniel coaches in the Big Ten Conference. He is a nationally recognized coach and is well-respected among his peers.

**Ben**

Over the last forty-six years, Ben has coached football, ranging from high school to FBS football. He initiated a leadership strategy to earn an astounding winning record. Ben has been coaching at the Division 2 level for over fifteen years and will retire this year to pursue coaching his grandson. Ben is an HFC in the Great Lakes Valley Conference.

**David**

David has been to the playoffs numerous times at the Division 2 level at his current institution. He takes pride in leading his team with a no-frills approach. David is passionate about developing athletes for success in football and for a prosperous life after their collegiate career. David is an HFC in the Gulf South Conference and is highly recognized by his peers.

**Tom**

Tom started coaching as a student assistant at his alma mater after sustaining severe injuries that shortened his playing career. While coaching at numerous FBS institutions, Tom learned how to lead from high-profile coaches who shaped his current HFC leadership outlook. Tom has shown effective leadership in his current head coaching position and has reached multiple bowl games in recent years. Tom currently coaches in the Mid-American Conference.

**Jacob**

Jacob started coaching at the Division 2 level and has climbed to numerous HFC positions. While also having FBS position coaching duties, Jacob has developed a leadership strategy to earn multiple playoff wins at the Division 2 level. Jacob coaches in the Gulf South Conference.

**Eli**

Eli has been coaching college football for over forty years. While learning from his predecessors, Eli gained experience from knowledgeable coaches who shaped his leadership outlook. Eli credits his current success as an HFC to the lessons learned within his coaching journey struggles. Reaching the playoffs repeatedly in the Division 2 level, Eli's leadership has proven to be highly effective. Eli coaches in the Great Lakes Valley Conference.

**Jon**

Jon has an impressive track record of success. Primarily at the Division 2 level, Jon consistently ranks in the top half of the conference and has been coaching for over thirty years. Jon is also a leader in many college football associations. Jon coaches in the Great American Conference.

**Sam**

Sam is the head coach at the FCS level and has earned playoff appearances in recent years. He gained most of his experience at the FBS level as a position coach and coordinator. During his coaching career, Sam has gained immense knowledge from highly reputable coaches. Sam coaches in the Southern Conference.

**Jay**

Jay has been coaching for the last thirty years and is currently an HFC in the Southern Conference at the FCS level. Unlike the typical college coaching journey, Jay has only coached at several other NCAA institutions. Jay has reached the playoffs repeatedly in past years and continues to show a reoccurrence of success in leading a winning program.

**Gary**

Gary has proven to be successful at each coaching stop throughout his career. Starting from the bottom of the coaching spectrum, Gary climbed to the FBS ranks, where he learned from revolutionary college coaches. Gaining much experience at the FBS level and having a nationally ranked team multiple times, an effective leadership strategy was initiated. Gary also coaches in the Big Twelve conference.

**Steven**

Steven coaches at the FCS level and is no stranger to playoffs or being nationally ranked. Steven continuously leads winning teams that rank in the top half of one of the best FCS conferences. Steven coaches in the Missouri Valley Football Conference and competes against teams consistently winning FCS championships.

**Malcolm**

Malcolm is a Division 2 HFC and the youngest of all participants. He coaches for one of

the premier Division 2 teams in the country and has been a Division 2 head coach for numerous programs. Malcolm's leadership significantly focuses on developing athletes for a prosperous life after playing. Malcolm coaches in the Rocky Mountain Conference.

**Table 4**

*Participants*

Participant Name	Division	Conference
Jim	D1-FCS	Ohio Valley
Daniel	D1-FBS	BIG 10
Ben	D2	Great Lakes Valley
David	D2	Gulf South
Tom	D1-FBS	Mid-American
Jacob	D2	Gulf South
Eli	D2	Great Lakes Valley
Jon	D2	Great American
Sam	D1-FCS	Southern
Jay	D1-FCS	Southern
Gary	D1-FBS	BIG 12
Steven	D1-FCS	Missouri Valley
Malcolm	D2	Rocky Mountain

*Note:* The “D” means Division, and the number after refers to the competition level. “FBS” is called Football Bowl Sub-division, and “FCS” means Football Conference Sub-division.

## Results

The thematic findings of this study describe the lived experiences of winning college HFC leadership initiatives among those who compete in the NCAA. Van Manen’s (2016) hermeneutical framework and data analysis approaches were used to develop themes according to the study’s theoretical framework. The participants engaged in an individual interview,

submitted a protocol writing prompt response, and participated in a focus group discussion. The themes regarding the head football coaches lived experiences are portrayed below in Table 5 and Appendix H.

**Table 5**

*Themes & Sub-Themes*

Themes	Sub-Themes
Initiate leadership to guide followers to success	Develop team cohesiveness Positive relationships among team members
Acquiring adequate team members Set short-term goals Started coaching career from the bottom Productive communication Leading by example Address issues to the Athletic Director Require buy-in	Express ambition
Intrapersonal player development Orchestrate genuine coaching Period based practice Tight end base offense Man-defense coverage Create the foundation of the program	Area recruiting followed by position recruiting
Developmental coaching	Professional Coaching
Understanding of expectations	

### **Initiate Leadership to Guide Followers to Success**

Most of the sample expressed the initiative to administer leadership to guide followers to success. Daniel shared, “I say probably everything; I think at the end of the day, you have to cast a vision for everything, and then you try to trust other people to carry it out.” Initiating leadership to guide followers to success was repeatedly referred to when many of the participants were asked interview questions. Ben stated, “I think it comes back to our relationships, our trust factor, my ability to let you outline our goals, me holding them accountable to obtain and reach those goals.” The expression of self-reliance to depict leadership involvement to guide followers was prevalent among the participants. David mentioned, “Every aspect of the football program, whatever you can think of, I’m involved because my name is on it. We lose; it is all me. We do not do something right in the community; it is on me.” Various participants stated that establishing the outlook for leadership objectives became a typical response. Sam offered, “You have a vision of what you want that program to look like.” Initiating leadership to guide followers to success is a primary method HFCs utilize to achieve a winning outcome. When addressing the writing prompt, HFCs expressed how their leadership influences team members to achieve successful outcomes. Daniel stated, “Make sure that you are holding everyone accountable for doing the process and what it takes to win.” This emphasis on accountability was a concise tactic the participants expressed as their initiative to achieve success.

The participants continued to share how implementing team-building activities guides their followers to cultivate an optimal team environment. The initiative of the participants is constantly stated as a resource used to achieve winning outcomes. Jon expressed, “We do a thing called the Accountability Board in the spring, where players are graded. The team could be disciplined; that is part of leadership is accountability.” The participants expressed an attempt to

be creative in initiating their leadership to guide their followers to succeed. When explaining the impact of their leadership initiative and the importance of it, the participants were able to exemplify the outlook of guiding their followers to success. Malcolm stated, “You have to understand what is important to you and what you want your team and your culture to be about, then chase that every single day.”

Many participants expressed that their leadership initiative was constantly utilized to guide followers to attain successful outcomes. The response to numerous questions consistently referred to initiating adequate leadership to guide their followers to succeed. One participant expressed how their sole duty is to develop a winning program by which followers are to be cultivated to reach ideal outcomes. The whole sample referenced their initiative to guide their followers in answering various interview questions successfully.

### ***Develop Team Cohesiveness***

Every sample member expressed the theme of initiating their leadership to guide followers to success. The sub-theme of developing team cohesiveness was specifically inferred to accompany that primary thematic finding. When responding to the writing prompt, David explained a method he utilizes to develop cohesiveness when he mentioned, “Players talking, and it gets them to know one another on an intimate level. Furthermore, that creates more of a family atmosphere.” Jon also used a similar tactic to build team cohesiveness; he mentioned, “They get to ask them about eight questions from the team, and we always let those guys talk about things that they wish they have done differently.” Multiple coaches expressed that establishing an effective communication environment where players better understand one another helps develop better relationships and create a more cohesive team. Numerous participants expressed it as a purposeful strategy in their initiative to enhance team cohesiveness.



The head coaches stated that developing team cohesiveness guided their followers to success. Sam referenced his cohesive development strategy when stating, “It is really important to be able to articulate what your vision is and then be an example of how you want everyone to work towards that vision and then hold everybody accountable to it.” Sam expresses how he aims to create cohesion by initiating a standard where members are held “accountable” and ensuring that team standards are sustained. Jacob expressed his strategy for cultivating team cohesiveness when stating, “For us, it's so much about being on the same page, buying in, we challenge our guys to submit to the program and get on the same page. When guys are on the same page, and we all speak the same language.” The participants' responses expressed team cohesiveness and were portrayed as a foundational strategy for a successful college head coach.

### ***Positive Relationships Among Team Members***

Another sub-theme of enabling positive relationships among team members was expressed in the responses to the protocol writing prompt. All participants stated that they should strive to foster positive team relationships. Daniel mentioned his method to enable positive relationships among players when stating,

We implemented a senior retreat in the summer, a time when guys could get to know each other on a much more personal level. Those guys could look at each other and talk about what they expected and demanded from each other, and we were able to connect with the seniors. They were kind of all in it together.

Other participants also spoke on the initiative to build relationships to guide their team to success and how relationship building typically took place in the off-season. David mentioned how he developed positive relationships between players and coaches in the off-season, stating, “We will have ten groups of 10 each, and we put them in a room together, and we have a coach that

starts it off. We will switch the groups up so guys can learn about other people on their team.” Sam exhibited coach-and-player relationships when he mentioned, “We have team captains out of that leadership group, and they draft the team, then draft a coach. So, our coaches actually get drafted as their team coach.” Enabling positive relationships among team members is a sub-theme commonly associated with the primary theme of initiating leadership to guide followers to success. It was frequently mentioned, and the participants were reluctant to continue to express it as an effective technique.

### **Acquiring Adequate Team Members**

A prevalent response to achieve a winning outcome was to acquire adequate team members. All of the participants would refer to hiring influential staff members as a primary objective to attain a winning team outcome. Tom expressed this narrative when stating, “It is being able to retain a bunch of really good coaches, guys that have done it at the very highest level, guys that are loyal.” The participants made it clear that the influence of team members generates earned team results, and staff members have the direct capability to enhance player development. Jay emphasized the impact of staff members when stating, “It is so much about getting the right people in your program starts with staff. Simply finding people who fit your place, values, and organization.” Malcolm said, “The most important thing a head coach can do is hire a good staff and make sure that you have got the guys around you that believe in what you want to accomplish.” The head coaches expressed how assistant coaches are directly involved with player development and continuously referenced the coach's importance in preparing athletes to achieve ideal outcomes. However, one participant proclaimed that there could be non-coaching factors that could hinder player development, such as “young players” having a “recruiting issue” and “players becoming resistant to learning.” Nonetheless, acquiring adequate

staff members was a significant priority among many participants' responses in achieving a winning outcome.

Aside from acquiring adequate staff members to achieve ideal outcomes, player acquisition was considered significant. The importance of recruiting enabled the participants to express the importance of acquiring ideal talented athletes to administer team objectives. Tom expressed the importance of recruiting by stating, "It is all about recruiting to bring in the right people with the right values, along with being talented, and that has been our formula." Jim added, "Number one is our talent acquisition; there is nothing more important than who we bring into our program." The participants constantly referenced recruiting as a valuable strategy to obtain adequate team members to achieve ideal team outcomes. Attaining adequate team members was expressed as a direct initiative of the head coach, where there is a primary influence on who the HFC would like to acquire. Staff acquisition is constantly mentioned due to their developmental influence on athletes. Acquiring staff members complements player recruitment, which was repeatedly referred to by most of the participants.

### **Set Short-Term Goals**

To ensure ideal outcomes are met, all but two coaches repeatedly mentioned setting short-term goals to achieve team objectives. Ben mentioned, "I think breaking your season down your calendar year. When I say season your entire year of training down into short goals, you know you are in alignment." The participants explained the collective ideology that daily efforts contribute to achieving team objectives. Jim mentioned this by stating, "I believe that it is a focus on the process. A championship by doing the best you can every single day." Eli also expressed, "We approach one to it is one day at a time, one day at a time, and then it is one week, you know, one game at a time." The participants spoke about how setting short-term goals allows the

HFC to monitor team progress and continues to motivate team members. Steven said, “Long-term goals cannot be motivating sometimes because there is no feedback. That is why I like the short-term stuff; you get feedback.” Steven is expressing how constant feedback ensures progress towards achieving team objectives.

Rather than focusing on the ultimate team objective, such as attaining a winning team outcome, the head coaches prioritized their short-term efforts to equate to success. Daniel stated, “I think it is really winning is not our focus; it is the sum of all the parts here that we have put together.” The objectives that result in team wins can be followed by signifying the journey. The participants had a concise ideology when referring to the effect of short-term goals. The coaches expressed an influence on attaining team objectives by focusing on completing short-term tasks that will likely result in ideal team outcomes. Three HFCs did not value the goal-setting act. Jim said, “I do not think setting a goal has ever helped. You know, I am not a big goals guy. I have just personally not.” He explained that goals can be “misleading” and take away realistic approaches to reaching ideal objectives. Daniel also expressed that he is “not a huge goal person” for a reason similar to Jim's. When interviewing Jay, he also spoke about not investing in goal setting considerably when he responded, “We don't have a lot of goals.” While other participants desired to set short-term goals to reach team objectives, these three outliers focused on daily objectives to progress. However, the general response was that the participants directed their center of attention to the journey and short-term goals to guide the team in achieving a winning program.

### **Started Coaching Career from the Bottom**

The participants' leadership initiative has been shaped by their experiences while climbing to their HFC role. All but one sample expressed that they started their coaching career

from the bottom ranks of the college coaching industry. Jacob stated, “I started at Division 2. I was there making no money.” Steven also was not in a prosperous initial position when responding, “My first coaching opportunity was at a small NAIA School.” Most of the participants entered the industry as a student assistant or a graduate assistant. Tom stated he worked both roles, but the level at which he started was the FBS level. Sam, Daniel, and Jay all started as graduate assistants. Ben started his career at the high school level, and Jim and Gary began at junior college. The sample members expressed that starting at the bottom of the college football coaching industry is an opportunity to learn from their predecessors how to administer their particular style of leading. One participant was emotional when explaining his strife, which shaped his leadership initiative and enabled him to be the leader he is. He explained how starting his career from the bottom ranks taught him humility and how to value all team members, regardless of rank. Starting their coaching career from the bottom, the participants expressed the ability to cultivate leadership initiatives specific to their direct influences.

### **Productive Communication**

Ten head coaches expressed how to communicate effectively to generate productivity among team operations. Gary stated, “Honestly, holding people accountable. It's open communication, and then and again, my job is to provide support.” Communicating between the head coach and assistant coaches was conveyed when solving potential issues. Steven said, “If I think there was a problem, how their behavior was on the field or how they treat players, I'm going to go address it.” Different participants expressed how communication is relied on to create productivity, and the head coaches would address team members directly. Eli reiterated, “I go straight to the guy; I hired him. Not the coordinator.” When addressing issues among fellow

coaches, Eli does not use a buffer to communicate; he uses direct, productive communication to confront team members head-on.

Many participants continued to speak about conducting productive communication between themselves and their student-athletes to enhance their development. Various head coaches stated that meeting with players throughout the year was an effective method for productive communication. Jay went on to state,

I will meet with them twice a year: at the end of the season and in the spring. After they meet with their position coach and the coordinator, they cannot meet with me until they finish those. Not long ago, I used to set about 15-minute blocks to do that, where it is genuinely sat down, you know, twice a year.

Jay and other members of the focus group mentioned yearly meetings with athletes. Malcolm coincided and said, “I do it twice a year. I will do it as soon as the season ends, and then I will do it at the end of the spring before we all go on vacation in the summer.” Jacob and David also met with players twice a year to communicate productively. Most participants also met with their assistant coaches on the same timeline. Conducting productive communication is an initiative many HFCs refer to constantly to ensure coherence among the leader and followers.

### **Leading by Example**

Most participants continuously mentioned how head coaches lead by example so team members can follow their actions. Gary mentioned, “I have to live these principles, and I think it is essential that everybody sees me living them, and you just have to set the example.” The participants talked about how essential it is for corrective measures to lead by example. Eli stated, “You lead by example; you tell him your expectations, and then if you see something you do not like, you fix it.” The HFCs frequently mentioned how leading by example was essential to

cultivating team success. However, there was one outlier. Daniel was the sole participant who expressed a lack of initiative to influence the coach's behavior. He responded, "I don't believe that I can. I don't believe I can have an effect on people. I think it's, you know, people are people; they make their own decisions." Daniel continued to speak on acquiring adequate team members and finding the right coaches that fit the program.

Many HCs mentioned how leading by example is a behavior carried out by the head coach to present an acceptable method of organizational behavior. Ben said he leads by example: "Leadership is going to lead by example. And I think modeling the behavior you want is the consistency." Frequently, the participants spoke about exhibiting the behaviors sought to model the ideal behavior among team members. Jay mentioned, "You just set the standard for the coaches." Each participant explained how leading by example enabled the head coaches to display team standards. It was a prevalent theme among data collection methods, and most HCs administered it.

### **Address Issues to the Athletic Director**

The sample was asked about their procedures when organizational issues arose, and all participants presented a correlating theme of addressing issues with the athletic director, which was stated as a standard solution. When an issue would occur, Eli stated, "The AD (Athletic Director) knows. Be upfront, honest, and truthful. Do not have secrets; you do not wait; communicate. Do it right now to the problem." Communicating with the athletic director was referenced in almost all participant's responses. Jon emphasized this when commenting, "You got to make sure that you have good communication lines with your administration and your athletic director." Expressing how vital it is to have transparency with the athletic director was

continuously spoken of, and no participant denied addressing issues with the athletic director when asked during the interview.

While many issues occur in an organizational setting, the participants expressed that the athletic director is typically involved when team members experience a legal issue. Ben responded, “Anything legally related, anything that could potentially shed a negative light on a University in general or athletic program in general. Going to let him know immediately.” Ben refers to informing the athletic director about legal issues among team members. Jay also expressed this context and stated, “He is involved here when some kind of legal side.” The severity of team members undergoing legal issues warranted by most of the participants' responses identifying the theme of addressing the athletic director.

### **Require Buy-In**

The HFCs were asked questions throughout data collection to identify leadership strategies to attain a winning outcome. Most HFCs revealed that they would strive to require buy-in from team members. Tom expressed, “It is a critical piece of your formula for success to have people that are completely aligned with you.” Tom also discussed how the head coach's vision needs to be in full cooperation with all players, and assistant coaches are not exempt either. Steven stated, “The coaches have to uphold the culture and our standards, too. They know when you are putting forth effort in their preparation.” Requiring buy-in was a prevalent response among the HFCs to execute their program outlook. Responses supported how the participants would enable their vision to be executed through member buy-in.

The sample continued to refer to their assistant coaches when requiring buy-in to assert their leadership endeavors to attain a winning outcome through their vision and approach. Ben responded, “As I begin to work with the new staff here in a couple of weeks with all that stuff of



what we want, the expectation level is for you in terms of interacting with our roles.” The HCs expressed a clear expectation mandated among their coaching staff. One participant ensured buy-in before hiring a coach. Eli mentioned, “When I hire a guy, I tell him my philosophy. This is what I believe in.” Two participants also followed Eli’s strategy and mentioned that their vision was clearly stated and adherence needed to be reciprocated before hiring a new coach. Requiring buy-in among staff members was a prevalent primary theme that many coaches expressed to assert their leadership outlook. Numerous other HFCs explained that if assistant coaches fail to buy into and execute the HFCs' outlook, termination would likely occur if athletes fail to “progress.” Buying into the leader's approach to leadership was an essential component expressed by the participants.

### ***Express Ambition***

When creating buy-in among team members, numerous sample members presented the ideology of followers expressing ambition when carrying out the leaders' vision. The HFCs spoke about how team members have a sense of enthusiasm. Jacob spoke about the impact of ambition and enthusiasm when he responded, “I have always believed in enthusiasm. I believe you can out-enthuse your opponent. We talked to our guys about being enthusiastic throughout the week and the game.” Expressing ambition was continuously referenced as a sub-theme to requiring buy-in, and the participants stated that it was a tool used to administer the HFCs vision. Both participants expressed that hiring ambitious assistants would help nurture and mentor student-athletes. Expressing legitimate ambition was a common theme and often referred to as enthusiasm. Having enthusiastic and ambitious team members was a common leadership strategy that the HCs would infer.

## **Intrapersonal Player Development**

The sample was questioned about enabling players to achieve a winning outcome. All of the sample members revealed that they would enable intrapersonal player development. David indicated intrapersonal when he stated, “Players need to see a good teacher. This is our class, and we are teaching. We are not just teaching Football; we are teaching life.” Intrapersonal development is continuously referenced concerning football intelligence and learning life lessons. Tom inferred, “The life lessons, the discipline, the accountability, the teamwork that you learn and get them ready to be leaders and good men in the community.” Intrapersonal development is highly regarded in this sense. Various responses referenced the concept of enabling intrapersonal selflessness and teamwork. Steven commented, “We are going to be great teammates and be more concerned about what we give to the team.” The participants exclaimed that player buy-in is enhanced by enabling athlete intrapersonal development.

Enabling intrapersonal player development was expressed in conjunction with orchestrating genuine coaching. The HFCs frequently referred to preparing the structure of their program to enable players to develop in that respect. Ben stated, “I have got eighteen coaching principles. A lot of that is how we will interact with the players, with staff procedures.” The HCs noted that relying on their initiative to guide staff members in coaching athletes to encourage intrapersonal development. Intrapersonal development was also referenced to preparing athletes for competition. Jacob emphasized, “I just want the job done; I want you to grow within, and that way, you can expand your knowledge.” Many participants mentioned that the “end goal” is for players to learn and create intrapersonal growth within their athletes. The head coaches elaborated that intrapersonal player development was highly regarded as enabling players to live “wholesome” lives after their college playing career while also learning football-related abilities.

## **Orchestrate Genuine Coaching**

When asserting the HFC's leadership outlook, most of the sample conveyed the necessity for their assistant coaches to orchestrate genuine coaching. It was a prevalent response amongst most of the participants to require various perspectives of genuineness. When discussing the outlook for orchestrating genuine coaching, Tom said, "I want them to care deeply about our players." Treating athletes in a genuine manner and with respect was referenced repeatedly when head coaches were asked about how their coaches should be developing student-athletes. Eli stated, "You should build relationships with your players, coach them hard, and never call them names." Enabling genuine coaching was a typical response. Jon referred to genuine relationships when mentioning, "Building that relationship with those guys, I don't know that they really know who you are without relationships. Have great communication skills and learn who each other is by being good listeners." The sample expressed how orchestrating genuine coaching was used to help create player buy-in. Jon spoke about a genuine coaching outlook when responding, "We make it about the players first; it is about the players. It's always about the team." Jay expressed a genuine coaching model when stating, "Being honest with people and truthful with them." Genuine coaching continued to be a focal point in many responses.

The sample shared a common perspective of the HFC setting a genuine vision for followers. Coaching with a cohesive structure was often expressed throughout the participants' responses. Ben expressed, "I think creating an atmosphere or a culture once again where we're all working together with the same common goal." Orchestrating genuine coaching correlated with how assistants should present themselves as ideal examples for athletes. David mentioned how coaches should be genuine in their representation. David iterated, "Coaches should be a great role model for them. They need to see a good role model." The participants explained how

orchestrating genuine coaching was a daily and personal endeavor, and Tom mentioned, “I believe it's your daily actions. I think it is how you act, how you treat people.” Orchestrating genuine coaching was frequently spoken about in various sectors, including how assistants conducted themselves amongst the athletes. It was said to be a fundamental approach to player development and enabled athlete buy-in to occur.

### **Period-Based Practice**

All of the HFCs, except for one, stated that they used a period-based practice strategy. Period-based practices were typically structured into twenty to twenty-five five-minute increments. Jim mentioned that the structure of his practice is twenty-four five-minute periods. Gary's practice duration would vary; he stated, “Typically, we practice anywhere from eighteen to twenty-four periods an hour and a half to two hours, 5-minute periods.” Steven mentioned using the scoreboard clock to keep them on track with practice periods. Eli used a period-based practice, but his periods were longer than five minutes. Eli said, “ It's ten-minute periods on our schedules.” Eli referenced an organizational factor to reduce periods that need to be followed by coaches and players, but he still used periods to structure his practice. The only participant who did not use a period-based practice was Daniel. Daniel's rationale was that he uses segments and blocks to spend more time on one focus. The participant referenced “lost time” from period to period—however, eleven interviewees utilized periods to organize their practice plans.

The sample was adamant about the structure behind their period-based practice plan. David mentioned, “We would go for a total of twenty periods. That would be a long that's an extended practice for us.” The HCs would continue to say how altering periods strategically can create an optimal practice environment for player development. Malcolm depicted his practice plan when stating, “We go twenty-period practice. It's about making sure that our guys are fresh

going on gameday on Saturday, so we taper off pretty heavily as soon as we start the season.” Conducting the period-based practice was a primary theme, with only one outlier, and the participants stated their reliance on its strategic methods.

### **Tight End Base Offense**

When discussing the structure of the participants’ offensive strategy, all but two participants revealed having a tight-end base offense as a primary theme. The addition of the tight end in the offensive personnel is called eleven or twelve personnel. All of the HFCs, but one used a tight-end base offense. Jacob said, “We are probably primarily eleven personnel.” Gary concurred with Jacob, as did David, Jay, and Jim. There was only one outlier among the sample who did not utilize tight ends to base their offense and mentioned having a multiple-style offense. The participants expressed how to use the tight end position to gain an advantage strategically.

Some head coaches spoke about using more than one tight end due to their effectiveness. Sam indicated that when saying, “We play out of eleven, twelve, and thirteen personnel. I call pro spread.” Tom stated that his base offense utilizes two tight ends due to being able to be in “multiple formations.” Daniel said he used a multiple-style offense, where there is no standard method of an offensive scheme; instead, numerous styles of offense are executed. Despite that, he mentioned that the tight end position was a “pivotal” aspect of their personnel. The majority of the participants exclaimed their use of basing their offense with the tight end personnel and, by doing so, described an unwavering attempt to gain a strategic advantage.

### **Man-Defense Coverage**

After questioning offensive strategies, the participants were asked about the style of defense utilized. All of the participants, except for two, portrayed the theme of utilizing a man-

defense coverage. Defensive coverages are typically categorized as man coverage or zone coverage. The difference between the two defense styles is that man coverage matches a defender to guard one particular offensive player, and zone coverage requires the defensemen to protect a specific area or “zone.” Jim mentioned his defensive coverage when stating, “More of a man team.” Gary also mentioned that his team administers “a lot of man” when referring to the defensive coverage. Other participants used the phrase “quarters” for man defense coverage, where defenders guard twenty-five percent of the field and guard a specific offensive player in that area. Roughly seventy-five percent of the HFCs administered a man-defense coverage. Jay expressed his defense as, “Man coverage. we are a lot of quarters.” Numerous other participants referenced quarter coverage when depicting their man-defense coverage. Jacob stated, “Based out of quarters and man free.” However, one participant stated, “We do not have a base defense.” Another outlier mentioned that their defense can vary between man and zone depending on their opponents. The other two participants who did not express a man-defense coverage proclaimed having a zone-coverage base defense. However, the HFCs' responses indicated that most of the sample administered man-defense coverage.

### **Create the Foundation of the Program**

When the sample spoke about initiating player development, the whole sample frequently referenced the theme of creating the foundation of their program to set the structure for player development. The participants referred to this primary theme continuously throughout triangulation. Jim stated his initiative to create the program foundation when he stated, “The most important thing I do is I create a system for recruiting offense and defense.” The attainment of players was common among the coach’s responses to attain team personnel. Tom expressed how he valued developing the team foundation when he mentioned, “I meet with the recruiting

department separately, but away from our staff to find out what our daily objectives are ; they are involved in every staff meeting.” The sample continued to emphasize the essentialness of communicating the foundational structure with staff members.

Eli spoke about the communication between him and his staff and how it created foundational expectations when he stated, “We sit down, and we meet about what I expect and how I want it done. You go through everything by maintaining constant communication, clear, concise communication, and talking about this is what we expect.” Jon conveyed, “You got to know what the standard is. You know, if people don't know what the standard is, I mean, there is always going to be a lack of discipline or lack of control.” Steven explained how he communicated with team members to start creating the foundation when he responded, “I got to mentor guys, talk to them, ask questions, and listen; we have a conversation and, being a good listener and maybe share some past experiences.”

The sample continued to respond, alluding to creating the team's foundation. The HCs spoke thoroughly about their leadership outlook on creating the program's foundation. Malcolm expressed the value of the staff in establishing the precedent for the team's foundation, and he stated,

It is about hiring the right people and having a process for what you are looking for when you are hiring. Can I trust this guy? Is he a man of integrity? Finding guys whose visions align with that, too, is important. They have to be able to recruit, go out and find players, and teach the game.

Malcolm reiterated the importance of a coaching staff to conduct the HFC vision for creating the team's foundation. Gary exclaims, “You must create a culture where everybody is in it together. Everybody has a role; it's a shared responsibility among everybody.” The personnel

within the team's structure was a focal point in the participants' responses to create the foundation for the program. While speaking with Jay, he iterated about how staff members impacted the program's foundation when he stated, "It starts with how coaches set an example for them. It is just being consistent every day in everything you do; I'd rather see consistency over intensity. Just setting the standard and the expectation." Creating the program's foundation was constantly referred to as a primary theme and was reflected in the sample group.

### ***Area Recruiting Followed by Position Recruiting***

When initiating leadership to create the program's foundation, the HFCs exhibited the sub-theme area recruiting followed by position recruiting. Throughout the HCs' responses regarding creating the foundation, numerous HFCs spoke about their recruiting strategies to build up player personnel. The sample expressed that the typical outlook would require their staff to initially recruit a designated geographical area to find a variety of suitable athletes, followed by specialized recruiting by position. When interviewing Steven, he reasoned, "We go out in the areas and look for guys. Then we try to get the position coach involved earlier than later." Jay also mentioned an identical response when he said, "We will recruit by areas; you want the position coach and the coordinator to sign off on him." The collective response from the HFCs exhibited the strategy of area recruiting followed by position recruiting. David portrayed the strategy after describing methods to create the foundation of the program, and he stated, "We start off with an area, and if he becomes one of our top linemen, the coach is going to start taking over soon." Only one participant did not go in-depth on their recruiting vision but did mention area recruiting. Gary expressed that he adheres to this thematic strategy, but his leadership outlook differs slightly. Gary stated, "You've got an area recruit in the fall, and you have to position recruit in the spring and summer." However, while the timing of recruiting may differ,



Gary still conducts area recruiting followed by position recruiting. All of the HCs interviewed continued to discuss the sub-theme as a fundamental approach to creating the program's foundation.

### **Developmental Coaching**

The sample described their initiative to lead a winning program throughout data collection. After synthesizing the responses, all of the participants identified a concise theme of developmental coaching. It was a direct tactic to “teach athletes’ skills and abilities.” Jim referenced the teaching aspect when he stated, “All of my coaches are teachers, and so we have to be great teachers.” Jim responded that the teaching aspect is sought during the hiring process. Jim stated, “Most of the time, people get hired for their technical skills, job skills, or coaching skills.” During the discussion with Jacob, he described developmental coaching: “You truly love building people and helping people and finding good teachers. You cannot teach. You cannot coach.” When interviewing Daniel, he exhibited developmental coaching in his response, “That becomes development when you learn something new, you master it, you learn some new, you master it. That is development.” Developmental coaching was a primary technique all of the HCs elaborated on.

The participants disclosed the significance of developmental coaching in leading a winning football program. When speaking with David, he spoke about the developmental factor. David said, “I think our job as coaches is to build better men, and I think everything we're trying to teach them is helping them become great student-athletes. But it is also preparing them to go on past here.” He continued to talk about how “more than football” development is administered. Tom also spoke about the same outlook when he mentioned, “You're not only trying to get him

to play good football, and you're trying to teach him all the great life lessons.” Developmental coaching was referenced concerning players being taught a diverse skill set.

When further discussing developmental coaching, the HCs discussed developing their assistant coaches. Sam mentioned, “What we do is we do in staff clinics, you know, we spend time ‘clinic-ing’ each other. we will put on team position clinics.” Developmental coaching among staff members continued to be prevalent. Steven referenced a strategy for developing coaches by stating that coaches are “allowed their professional development opportunities to visit other people you know, provide them with resources within your budget to help develop guys, and then you challenge them to be better.” One participant said he considered this aspect of coaching development as “investing” in the coaching staff. Jon mentioned an indirect method of staff developmental coaching when he said, “The best way to teach the coach is, you know, first of all, you got to turn them loose. You got to let them coach where they can make some mistakes.” The participants continued to speak about different methods of increasing the coaching value of their staff. Developmental coaching was discussed among the whole sample regarding increasing athletes' sport-related skills, intrapersonal aspects, and enhancing assistant coach abilities. Thematic analysis derived this theme through the totality of the participants' responses.

### ***Professional Coaching***

When the participants explained their developmental coaching strategies, the sample presented the sub-theme of professional coaching. The whole sample utilized professional coaching as a technique to administer developmental coaching. Conducting a professional approach was referenced when Gary said, “You can teach somebody, so you have to be a good communicator. You have to be constantly assessing, then provide feedback, and then, you know,

keep encouraging.” A professional outlook on developing players continued throughout the interview responses. When interviewing Daniel, he spoke about his and the assistant's role in exhibiting coaching professionalism in his statement,

My job is to help develop them as much as there is nothing else; the interaction, that is standard, has all the things we talked about. First, we have to teach them that they are here to teach them the ‘what’. You know what we want them to do. We also teach them how to help them execute it. We have to give them constant feedback so that they can continually evolve and scaffold their learning.

Numerous HCs spoke about how their assistants coach with a professional approach. Jay mentioned, “You have a plan. Have a system. Get the guy to play better than he's capable of playing. Getting the most out of that team.” Conducting a professional outlook kept appearing as a sub-theme to developmental coaching. Administering coaching professionalism was common in most of the participants' responses, and a strategy was used to assert developmental coaching.

### **Understanding Expectations**

Throughout the interview process, most of the sample members provided responses that enabled an understanding of expectations among team members. When interviewing Tom, he described how he ensured expectations were understood among the staff. Tom stated, “The philosophy is finding people that are like-minded, high energy, goal-oriented, very good teachers, and very good people, and we take great pride in hiring the right people.” Jacob spoke about the severity and the consequences if staff members fail to represent the team's expectations; he responded, “Ultimately, non-communicator guys that do not listen, that don't adhere to the rules and values and the program, they just got to go.” Jon iterated that expectations among the staff were communicated before hiring a coach; he mentioned, “I hire the right coach,

and we're going to be on the same page before they get in there.” The participants continued to take the initiative in communicating expectations and ensuring those expectations were understood by the coaching staff.

The value of enabling an understanding of expectations among the coaching staff was held in the highest regard among the sample responses. The sample continued to refer back to proper coaches who were willing to understand and carry out the expectations set by the HFC. Gary responded, “It's really important for me to hire people with the same philosophy. I'm always looking for that right fit.” A similar outlook from most HCs was communicated and ensured expectations were communicated during the hiring process and an understanding of ideals would be followed. Ensuring understanding of the HFCs' expectations among staff members was a common discussion point throughout many interviews.

### **Outlier Data and Findings**

Throughout the interviews, some participants spoke about their unique perspectives and unusual strategies that failed to fall under primary themes or sub-theme categories. Outliers were specific to only a few of the participants, while others were unique to one HFC's leadership initiative. The outlier and the participant's rationale will be discussed below.

### ***Defensive Coverage***

The participants were questioned about the strategy of their offensive and defensive schemes. When responding about the structure of their defense, only three HFCs mentioned conducting a zone defense coverage, while most of the sample administered a man defense. The responses from the participants identified this outlier among the sample. Daniel expressed his defensive coverage when he said, “We are a 335 defense.” This indicates that his defense requires three defensive linemen, three linebackers, and five defenders in coverage. This

structure allows the five defenders to guard a specific zone, where players are spread out to protect areas of the field together. He mentioned that the zone defense is specific to the coordinator's strategy and not necessarily his method. Jon mentioned he runs “base coverage,” which refers to zone defense coverage. It is a standard defense where players designate an area to be protected, and little communication needs to occur since players know the area to be defended. When questioning Ben during the interview, he blatantly stated he administered his defense with zone coverage. Conducting a zone coverage is not an uncommon style of defense, but among the sample, conducting it was an outlier.

### **Research Question Responses**

The research questions provided the structure and inference of this hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative research study. This study consisted of one central question and four sub-questions. Each research question aligned with the theoretical model. Below and in Appendix I, Table 6 depicts the thematic alignment with each research question.

**Table 6***Research Questions and Thematic Alignment*

Themes	Sub-Themes	Research Question
Initiate leadership to guide followers to success		Central Research Question
	Develop team cohesiveness	Central Research Question
	Positive relationships among team members	Central Research Question
Acquiring adequate team members		Central Research Question
Set short-term goals		Central Research Question
Started coaching career from the bottom		Central Research Question
Productive communication		Sub Question 1
Leading by example		Sub Question 1
Address issues to the Athletic Director		Sub Question 1
Require buy-in		Sub Question 2
	Express ambition	Sub Question 2
Intrapersonal player development		Sub Question 2
Orchestrate genuine coaching		Sub Question 2
Period based practice		Sub Question 3
Tight end base offense		Sub Question 3
Man-defense coverage		Sub Question 3
Create the foundation of the program		Sub Question 3
	Area recruiting followed by position recruiting	Sub Question 3

Developmental coaching	Sub Question 4
Professional coaching	Sub Question 4
Understanding of expectations	Sub Question 4

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### Central Research Question

The central research question asked about the lived experiences of winning college HFCs' leadership initiatives. The participants responded concisely and overwhelmingly to the central research question throughout data collection. Four primary themes and two sub-themes answered the central research question: initiating leadership to guide followers to success, acquiring adequate team members, setting short-term goals, and starting a coaching career from the bottom were the primary themes. The two sub-themes derived after data analysis were to develop team cohesiveness and positive relationships among team members were also revealed. The first theme, initiate leadership to guide followers, was referenced throughout many levels of leadership approaches, and coaches relied on it as a fundamental technique for leading a winning college HFC. When interviewing Jim, he said, "I mean, everything starts at the top. I believe that, and you lay it out like this is what we're about. This is our vision." Malcolm explained his leadership initiative when he stated,

It's about holding everyone to a high standard. Once you have achieved success holding everyone to the same standard consistently, you know they are saying that your culture is only as good as the worst essential behaviors that you allow. I think preaching a consistent message, holding everyone to a very high standard, investing in your people, you know, developing and creating relationships, real relationships.

The data findings revealed two sub-themes when responding to the central research question. During data analysis, it was identified that winning college HFCs leadership initiative would develop team cohesiveness and enable positive relationships among team members. To

develop team cohesiveness, Gary responded, “We start talking about our program, our outcomes, and what are we trying to accomplish and how we are going to accomplish these goals.” Sam mentioned his initiative for team cohesiveness. “You have a vision of what you want that program to look like, it's really important to be able to articulate what that vision is and then hold everybody accountable to it.” The participants expressed how they achieved team cohesiveness when members understood the leader's outlook.

Positive team member relationships were a standard tool among the participants' responses. It was their leadership initiative to lead a winning team to success. The sample constantly expressed their initiative of team-building events to build positive relationships. Jacob spoke about the effect of team building when he stated, “They will get emotional, you know, and then we'll switch the groups up so that guys can learn about other people on their team.” Many HFCs spoke about their leadership initiative and how it would create team relationships through community service efforts. Steven mentioned, “You see groups of guys out in the community at volunteer events, and they're cleaning up around our home field, our cleaning up on campus, really a lot of positive things.” By doing so, he was enabling genuine and positive relationships to form. Many other coaches also valued community service volunteers in groups for positive team building.

The following primary theme was acquiring adequate team members. It was an essential component of the majority's lived experiences. David expressed the value of acquiring adequate team members when stating, “People make the place; people make the organization.” Malcolm mentioned, “The most important thing a coach can do, in my opinion, is hiring a good staff and making sure that you've got the guys around you that believe in what you want to accomplish.” Acquiring adequate team members was expressed as a direct role of the lived experiences of the



participant's leadership initiative. Acquiring adequate team members was the HFC's "due diligence" to cultivate a winning team.

The theme of setting short-term goals to reach team objectives is a primary tactic among participant initiatives. Tom referred to the strategy of short-term goals and what could occur if the goals are not valued when he offered: "If not, you are just wandering aimlessly. So, goal setting, I think, is imperative." Short-term goals were conjoined with the participants' lived experiences as their direct leadership initiative. The sample continuously expressed how imperative it was to set short-term goals to keep team members motivated, progress towards ideal objectives, and measure team development. This theme was concise among all but one participant who did not value setting goals in general. Setting short-term goals was a spoken and reliable leadership method that enabled successful team production.

All but one participant started their coaching career at the bottom of the coaching industry. This was the fourth primary theme that answered the central research question. David expressed the start of his career journey when he said, "I started coaching as a student assistant graduate assistant at my alma mater." When speaking with Gary, he mentioned, "I started out as a high school football coach and then junior college." Other coaches started as graduate assistants at various levels, typically Division 2 students."

### **Sub-Question One**

The first sub-question discovers how winning college HFCs describe their interactions with staff members and athletes. Throughout data collection, the three primary themes addressed in sub-question one were productive communication, leading by example, and addressing issues to the athletic director. The participants answered this research question and went in depth to express the role of each theme. The theme of productive communication was conveyed among

the whole sample. Jacob described the essence of productive communication within his program: "Everybody understands the standard by behaving in a professional manner, so we don't have a lot of different issues." Conducting productive communication was an interaction that was relied on by the whole sample. Many HCs expressed their interaction with athletes multiple times a year to enact productive communication. Jay reported, "I will meet with them twice a year. At the end of the season, after the season in the spring." In David's response, he referred to a similar interaction schedule. He also expressed when he conducted productive communication with his coaches when he stated, "Exit meetings after spring and after season. But I will talk every day to all my coaches." Many other HFCs also meet with team members two times a year to discuss numerous topics to obtain a productive outcome. Productive communication was a primary theme that depicts the interactions between the HFC and team members.

The next theme derived from data collection was leading by example. This method highlights the indirect interactions the participants valued. The sample deeply valued leading by example due to its portrayal of proper conduction and ideal behaviors without directly having to communicate it. Leading by example was referred to on behalf of the participants themselves and the coaching staff. When speaking with Jay, he mentioned, "I'm a big example believer. You set the standard for them." Jon also depicted leading by example when he offered, "Setting the standard from the way I live it out up here to the things that I'm involved in off the field, I think it starts with your example as a leader." Interactions occur by leading by example due to the indirect communication of how to operate oneself. Daniel signified himself to lead by example when he expressed, "Hopefully, I am setting a good example myself. If you are not really supporting your own standards, so try to support it with my own behavior and back things up that I believe in." Leading by example was a common theme among the participants' responses to

various discussion questions regarding sub-question one. It was a tool for the HCs to use to interact with their team members and exhibit proper actions without directly communicating ideal behaviors.

Another primary theme from sub-question one was that participants would address issues with the athletic director. Administrative team members are heavily involved with program operations. The athletic director is the primary team member with the highest authority and responsibility who oversees the operations of a college football program. The sample was adamant about their interaction with the athletic director precisely when issues arose among team members. Tom spoke about his interactions with the athletic director when he stated, “You notify your athletic director immediately of the issue, and you just have a ton of communication to the appropriate people, and then you wait and listen to his guidance on how he wants you to proceed.” The HCs mentioned that severity issues warranted their interactions with the athletic director. Steven mentioned his interactions when he stated, “With any legal issue, the athletic director and our president at the university are involved immediately.” Interaction with the highest team member, the athletic director, and being transparent about organizational issues was commonly expressed among the sample.

### **Sub-Question Two**

Sub-question two asked how winning college HFCs explain initiatives for influencing staff members and athletes. Requiring buy-in, intrapersonal player development, and orchestrating genuine coaching were the main themes, and expressing ambition was the sole sub-theme. Requiring buy-in was an initial theme among the participants to influence team members to operate out of their standard. The sample members spoke about communicating the standard for assistants to adhere to. Jay spoke about attaining proper team members to create buy-in; he

mentioned, “We're all on the same page, you know, and we talked about it a lot. it starts with who you hire, and not everybody's fit here.” Daniel expressed the necessary buy-in within his football program when he iterated, “We're never going to demean someone. Keep it at a professional level, one which we would feel comfortable with someone you know, speaking like that to our kids.” Buying into the coach's standards enabled the HFCs to influence their team members to assert their standards to enable their vision for cultivating a winning program to be executed. Buy-in was a method the HCs used to influence team members to follow their leadership outlook and operate out of the standard that had been enacted.

One sub-theme addressed sub-question one, derived from the primary theme of requiring buy-in. The sub-theme expressing ambition was conjoined with buy-in when the participants depicted their influence on team members. Expressing ambition was a tactic that was used among the sample to encourage an ideal approach to being influential. David mentioned their expression of ambition to influence team members when he stated, “That's my job, you know, to find different ways to motivate my coaches and my players, and the enthusiasm has to come in the offseason.” Malcolm expressed his ambition to influence team members by saying, “It is about the team and being enthusiastic and motivated. We talk about not letting the guy next.” Expressing ambition was an initiative used by the participants to influence team members to administer optimal performance. Ensuring the expression of ambition was a technique that was used to create buy-in to have an overarching influence on the head coach's vision.

To enhance athletes' skills and abilities, the participants' responses revealed the primary theme of intrapersonal player development as a method to influence team members. The sample shared their outlook of valuing their athletes' intrapersonal development and requiring their assistant coaches to develop athletes in that respect. During Steven's interview, he required his

staff to enable athlete intrapersonal development when he stated, “I want guys that want to mentor the young man and get him better in all aspects of their life because I'm a true believer in how you handle the off the field stuff and you have high standards.” Tom also mentioned the necessity for staff to influence athletes by enabling intrapersonal player development, stating, “The coach needs to be involved in every aspect of the player's life. There is a Football side of this deal that we need to obviously be unbelievable teachers, unbelievable motivators.”

Influencing athletes by enacting intrapersonal development enhanced players' on-field skills and presented value for their gain. Player development was a method for influencing the athletes' overall well-being and enhancing the trust between the players and the coaching staff. The participants offered that influencing athletes through intrapersonal development exhibited how the sample valued their team members' personal growth for life after college football.

Another primary theme to influence team members was orchestrating a genuine coaching model. The head coaches shared that by administering a genuine coaching approach, the HFCs achieved an influential portrayal to create trust and buy-in between athletes and coaches.

Throughout Eli's interview, he valued his assistants orchestrating genuine coaching with athletes when he stated, “It all starts with the kids; they got to know you care about them. You cannot influence someone that they don't think you care about them.” Administering a genuine coaching model was common in most of the participants' responses for creating legitimate influence. Jim also expressed genuine coaching when he responded, “Living out our core values and being a good leader is by far the most important thing.” The sample referenced orchestrating genuine coaching as an approach to being honest, caring, and genuinely valuing the student-athletes. David mentioned in this interview how genuine coaching is conveyed when he stated, “My coaches do an excellent job of having their doors open and their players are in their offices. We

do a really good job in our program of eliminating gray areas.” The HCs frequently shared that genuinely caring for the athletes was a primary objective for their staff members to administer, and by orchestrating genuine coaching, it was achieved. The sample offered to encourage their coaching staff to administer a genuine coaching approach to have an overarching influence among their student-athletes.

### **Sub-Question Three**

Sub-questions three asked how winning college HFC ensures preparation among staff members and athletes. Four primary themes answered sub-question three: conducting a period-based practice, administering a tight end base offense, utilizing a man-defense coverage, and creating the program's foundation. The sole sub-theme was area recruiting, followed by position recruiting, and it was related to creating the program's foundation. The participants' responses support the developed themes and answer sub-question three.

To ensure preparation among team members, the sample shared the theme of conducting a period-based practice. All but one participant said that they used five-minute periods to structure the practice plan. Steven mentioned, “We practice in periods and have a five-minute clock.” The participants explained that it was a method to organize practice and ensure optimal planning could take place. Ben also spoke about conducting a period-based practice and mentioned the duration of the periods when he stated, “They're broken into five-minute increments.” The HCs spoke on how administering a period-based ensure allowed the HFC to incorporate various segments to prepare athletes' skills and abilities efficiently. Sam depicted his period-based practice and how it was used to prepare the athletes when he stated efficiently, “We'll do segments of either ten or five minutes, you know like your individual is two five-minute periods or three five-minute periods, and then we'll do a group period.” The sample spoke

about how a period-based practice ensures assistant coaches are prepared for the practice plan and can meticulously organize their strategies. The sample expressed that a period-based practice ensured adequate preparation for assistant coaches and players.

When speaking with the HCs, the next theme of structuring a tight end base offense was shared. The tight end position contains a versatile player who can block, catch, and create a strategic formational advantage. Only one coach did not utilize the tight end position for their offense. All other eleven HFCs utilized eleven or twelve personnel to ensure their team was prepared as effectively as possible. Jim referenced using eleven personnel mainly.” Jay responded about his offensive strategy when he depicted, “Mostly eleven personnel. Based on an air raid.” Tom said he prepared his offensive team members and utilized twelve personnel when he stated, “We are in twelve personnel. We have the NFL power running game to the spread run game that's in college, and it is completely West Coast in the throw game.” By structuring a tight end base offense, the participants could ensure their offensive strategy adequately prepared team members to defeat their opponents. It was concise among the whole sample and effectively prepared team members to be as effective as possible when facing the defense of opponents.

Initiating a man-defense coverage was another theme that the sample participants used as a base strategy to structure their defense. Only three participants did not use the man-defense coverage to prepare their team members. The rest of the HCs mentioned the use of man coverage, often referred to as quarters coverage. Eli referenced quarters coverage when he stated, “We are base quarters.” Sam also depicted a man-defense through quarters coverage when he offered, “Base coverage would be split safety quarters.” Man-defense coverage was utilized by the HFCs and was referred to as its effectiveness to justify its usage. The participants mentioned that structuring a man-defense coverage prepared their team members to be as effective as

possible when facing competition. Instilling a man-defense coverage was more effective than a zone defense, and it prepared their team members not to be as easily defeated.

The next theme the sample utilized to ensure team preparation was to create the team's foundation. Preparing team members was referenced as a direct initiative among the sample. The participants' responses exhibited this as a primary theme due to the excessive responses around creating the foundation. The HCs spoke about various initiatives used to create the teams' foundation. Daniel spoke on how he created the foundational precedent of his team when he offered, "It's just having a really clear, transparent set of expectations. I communicate it, and I said it just becomes the standard, and this is how we do things." This became Daniel's strategy for creating his team's foundational outlook. Tom depicted his vision for creating the foundation by stating, "Laying out the of your culture and your beliefs. It has to be on paper. It's constant communication with your core values and your message, and you find ways to say the same thing creatively." The sample continued to speak about their initiative to communicate the fundamental standards and expectations for creating the foundation of their team. When speaking with Tom, he referenced communicating with players about the foundation, stating, "We give our players our blueprint every day. Every time we have a team meeting," Creating the foundation of the team was an initiative of each participant and the coaches expressed the vision for the team's standards was understood and would be executed.

The sole sub-theme derived from the participants' responses to sub-question three was expressed as area recruiting followed by position recruiting. The participants discussed this method when discussing creating the foundation of the program. Initiating area recruiting followed by position recruiting was in connection with creating the program's foundation that prepares team members through adequate acquisition. Eli depicted this outlook when he stated,



“Everybody recruits their area, the position coaches watch it, and then the coordinators watch it, and then it gets to me.” Jon also responded, “We have a recruiting area, and once we get to a certain point in the process, we double-team the recruit by area and position coach.” By conducting area recruiting followed by position recruiting, the HCs ensured team preparation by acquiring ideal athletes to create the program's foundation, a fundamental technique in all participant responses.

#### **Sub-Question Four**

Sub-question four discovered how winning college HFCs stimulated staff members and athletes intellectually. There were two primary themes and one sub-theme that addressed sub-question four. Throughout data collection, the head coaches exhibited the primary themes of developmental coaching and understanding expectations. The sole sub-theme was coaching professionalism, and it coincided with developmental coaching. The HFCs shared their outlook on stimulating team members intellectually to achieve a winning outcome.

When speaking with the HFCs, the sample shared the primary theme of developmental coaching: stimulating team members intellectually. David shared the approach he administers when he offered, “We invest in the younger guys, especially on offense and defense, even on special teams. We are learning from each other.” An emphasis on developmental coaching was referred to through all three phases of the team. David mentioned that he ensures that younger athletes are being developed exponentially to create a foundation of teaching fundamentals. To stimulate team members through developmental coaching, Jacob shared his vision when stating, “We try to work the thing that that they need to do to be successful and create value for themselves.” The concise outlook that the participants shared was that through developmental

coaching, athletes could enhance their skills and ability to be intellectually stimulated and continue progressing with the coaching staff's efforts.

Professional coaching was the sole sub-theme derived from the participants' responses concerning developmental coaching. A professional coaching approach was the vessel in which the sample had the most impact on developing and intellectually stimulating athletes. During Steven's interview, he spoke about how development occurs when coaches exhibit a professional approach. He stated, "All my philosophy is we are teachers, and we're developing. When you come here, we are going to be preparing you." A professional coaching approach was frequently referred to among the HCs' responses. Daniel sought a professional coaching outlook during the hiring process when he stated, "I hire people that I believe are going to be successful." Seeking professional coaches continued to be a topic of discussion. Exhibiting professional coaching was referred to as a practical approach towards player development and intellectual stimulation.

The next theme that was revealed was understanding expectations. It was an initiative the participants referenced to stimulate their coaching staff and their athletes intellectually. Ben referred to the hiring process to convey how staff members understand expectations when he responded, "In the hiring, make certain that what is important to me, you got to get them to understand what that is philosophically." When interviewing Jon, he spoke on how essential it was for coaches to understand expectations and the consequences if expectations fail to be portrayed. Jon mentioned, "Getting those coaches to understand what you want on the field is critical. But if it gets to a point, naturally, we would have to make a family decision, and somebody has to go." The participants spoke on the value of coaches understanding the expectation and how it ensured their leadership strategy was being administered. Ben also spoke about the consequences of not understanding the HFCs' expectations when he stated, "I think that

I am visiting with you, and now you are just simply not purchasing what I'm telling you philosophically. This is going to have to change, or we'll end up making a change.” The sample members continuously iterated the value of team members' exhibiting an understanding of the expectations enacted by the head football coach.

### **Summary**

Chapter Four provided the leadership initiatives of the participants' lived experiences as a winning college HFC. Data analysis is based on Van Manen's (2016) hermeneutical framework. The study revealed sixteen primary themes and five sub-themes from the samples' responses. The primary themes (a) initiating leadership to guide followers to success, (b) acquiring adequate team members, (c) setting short-term goals, (d) starting a coaching career from the bottom, (e) productive communication, (f) leading by example, (g) addressing issues to the athletic director, (h) requiring buy-in, (i) intrapersonal player development, (j) orchestra genuine coaching, (k) period based practice, (l) tight end base offense, (m) man-defense coverage, (n) create the foundation of the program, (o) developmental coaching, and (p) understanding expectations. The five sub-themes are (a) developing team cohesiveness, (b) positive relationships among team members, (c) expressing ambition, (d) area recruiting, (e) position recruiting, and (f) professional coaching. Each of the participants' voices was iterated throughout the chapter to portray the phenomenon of the leadership initiative of a winning college HFC.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to describe and interpret the successful winning leadership approaches for college head football coaches. Chapter Five embodies the researcher's interpretation of the research findings. Each theme is interpreted to portray a hermeneutic understanding of each theme based on the provided data. Implications for policies and practices are discussed to give the relatable application of the thematic findings. Theoretical and methodological implications are also being discussed. The limitations, delimitations, and recommendations for future research provide the outlook for similar research methodology. The chapter is finalized with the conclusion.

### **Discussion**

This section discusses the study's thematic findings, which are derived from data obtained from the phenomenological data analysis and supported by empirical and theoretical sources. It depicts the researcher's interpretation of the findings and their empirical and theoretical implications. The study's limitations, delimitations, and recommendations for future research are also stated in this section.

### **Summary of Thematic Findings**

Data analysis was commenced using Van Manen's (2016) hermeneutical research framework as soon as data collection was completed. The selective method was utilized to analyze interview responses, the holistic method was administered for focus group responses, and the detailed approach was used to analyze the protocol for writing prompt responses. The thematic findings identified sixteen primary themes and five sub-themes. The primary themes are initiating leadership to guide followers to success, acquiring adequate team members, setting

short-term goals, started coaching career from the bottom, productive communication, leading by example, addressing issues to the athletic director, requiring buy-in, intrapersonal player development, orchestra genuine coaching, period based practice, tight end base offense, man-defense coverage, create the foundation of the program, developmental coaching, and understanding expectations. The six sub-themes are developing team cohesiveness, positive relationships among team members, expressing ambition, area recruiting, position recruiting, and professional coaching. Below, the researcher's interpretations are provided to present an identifiable understanding of the thematic findings. An interpretation of each theme is discussed. This section discusses the empirical and theoretical framework and implications for policy and practices and concludes with a summary.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The thematic findings identified sixteen primary themes and five sub-themes from the analyzed data. The primary themes are initiating leadership to guide followers to success, acquiring adequate team members, setting short-term goals, started coaching career from the bottom, productive communication, leading by example, addressing issues to the athletic director, requiring buy-in, intrapersonal player development, orchestra genuine coaching, period based practice, tight end base offense, man-defense coverage, create the foundation of the program, developmental coaching, and understanding expectations. The six sub-themes are developing team cohesiveness, positive relationships among team members, expressing ambition, area recruiting, position recruiting, and professional coaching.

#### ***Initiate Leadership to Guide Followers to Success***

The theme, initiate leadership to guide followers to success, was the most prevalent among all participants' responses. Initiating leadership to guide followers to success embodied

the responsibility and role of the head coach to lead their followers to achieve a winning outcome. Many of the head football coaches spoke about their role as leaders as a primary determinant for success in college football. The HFCs were involved with developing the structure of a team through team member acquisition, enabling an approach for team conduction, and dictating and influencing the team's culture, which are all primary roles the participants expressed as their initiative and duty. While there are many ideal outcomes for being a college HFC, the participants exclaimed that the ultimate objective is attaining a winning result in hopes of becoming a championship team. The participants offered various examples to guide their followers to success. Guiding team members was expressed as the essence of being a college HFC due to the hierarchy of command and the power the head coach has over staff members' conduction. The head coach spoke about their responsibility for overseeing hiring assistants to conduct their vision for player development and had the authority to terminate those not operating ideally.

The initiative for a college HFC engulfs numerous responsibilities, and depending on the head coach's leadership method, there is a significant impact on whether wins are achieved. Each participant spoke highly about the importance of their leadership role and its dependency on team success. The success of the sample seemed to rely deeply on their initiative to guide their followers to succeed. Guiding their followers to success puts much pressure and responsibility on the HFC, so the team's wins and losses are placed as the HFC's influence. Sample members spoke about how when a team wins, the coach is praised; if a team loses, the coach is blamed, and this is due to their leadership role being a vital factor for team outcomes. As a result, the winning coaches in this study relied on their initiative to guide followers to success.

**Develop a Cohesive Team Environment.** The participants explained that developing team cohesiveness was a successful method for achieving a winning team outcome. This sub-theme was prevalent among participants' responses and related to initiating leadership to guide followers to success. Developing a cohesive team was a method the HFCs utilized to guide their followers to achieve team success. The participants iterated on how developing a cohesive team was an effective strategy for team members to rely on one another, enhanced the trust between players and coaches, and created synchronicity within team activities. One participant spoke about how a team with over one hundred members could result in cliques, spontaneous arguments, and differentiating ideas. By developing team cohesiveness, the participants could guide their followers as a unit to achieve ideal success.

**The Value of Positive Team Member Relationships.** The participants expressed another sub-theme of creating positive relationships among team members by initiating leadership to guide followers. The participants consistently provided responses geared to ensure positive relationships to create a supportive team culture. A general justification for their responses was that many issues could arise if positive relationships fail to occur within a college football program. Other reasons the participants explained were that players could develop individual endeavors and despise each other, a lack of accountability among players could occur, and optimal development is potentially hindered. Positive relationships between the coaching staff were also stated as essential. The HFCs believed that winning team conduction occurs if coaches and athletes can operate in harmony with each other. According to the data analysis, workplace rapport can create a support system, encourage accountability, and assist other staff members. Additionally, the participants' responses expressed coach and player relationships as vital for player development. The participants emphasized that players need to know a coach

genuinely cares about their betterment to take their mentoring and guidance constantly. The participants' responses identified that by enabling positive relationships among all team members, the HFC can create a team culture where all followers are seeking genuine success for one another. An ideal team environment leads to optimal coaching and player development, which allows for a winning outcome expressed by each participant.

### ***Acquiring Adequate Players and Coaches***

The participants identified the primary theme of acquiring adequate team members, and it addressed the central research question. The participants spoke about how acquiring appropriate team members was an initiative that was a valuable responsibility of the HFC to achieve a winning outcome. Attaining effective assistant coaches who cooperate with the HFCs leadership initiative enables the head coach's outlook to be administered. The participants were cautious that assistants could be counterproductive to the team if the coaching staff is rebellious or resistant to the outlook of the HFC. In addition, numerous HCs mentioned how not every assistant coach might properly progress athletes, and terminating those coaches was the solution. To ensure athletes' skills and abilities are cultivated, the sample relied on acquiring a quality coaching staff, which is essential. Due to the direct impact positional coaches have on the athletes' learning and development, the participants spoke about having a significant influence on achieving team success by acquiring a quality coaching staff.

In addition to attaining effective assistant coaches, the sample expressed the importance of recruiting adequate student-athletes. It was a prevalent response among the whole sample. While the coaching staff impacts the athletes' skills and abilities, recruiting suitable players can enable efficient development. The participants were passionate about how recruiting athletes whose mentality fits the culture the HFC enacted is vital for coaching to occur smoothly. If



athletes are defiant and do not mesh well with the teaching methods of their positional coach, get along with fellow athletes, or do not adhere to the HFC's enacted team culture, the HFCs insist that a dysfunctional team environment would occur. Additionally, acquiring student-athletes with proper measurables assists in creating optimal player performance due to matching up well with opponents. The sample expressed that depending on the level of competition, a particular height, weight, speed, and strength is sought to have an adequate foundation for skill development. Acquiring student-athletes whose physical characteristics and mentality align with the outlook of the HFC is a primary determinant of the value of team personnel. As a result, the HFCs value acquiring adequate assistant coaches and players to achieve a winning team outcome.

### ***Short-Term Goals are More Effective than Long-Term Goals***

The participants expressed that setting long-term goals is not ideal. While all HFCs desired to be as successful as possible, the participants truly valued setting short-term goals to lead to a winning outcome. The participants focused on short-term goals; the sum of daily, weekly, and monthly achievements will equate to a winning outcome. Rather than focusing on specifically winning and being the best team, the HFCs set short-term goals to identify the requirements needed to become a winning team. Short-term goals portray a sense of measurable progression for team members. The participants created consistent enthusiasm by being aware of progress, development, and achievement. Setting short-term goals brings team members' attention to the journey necessary to reach a winning outcome. Setting short-term team goals was consistent among most of the sample.

### ***Climbing to be a College Head Football Coach***

Almost every coach spoke about starting their coaching career from a lower-level status. The participants spoke about how starting a coaching career from the bottom of the industry and

the journey to climb the ladder to being an HFC enable the attainment of valuable experience. One participant expressed how starting from the bottom increased his coaching knowledge by learning from fellow coaches with experience. The participants valued shadowing, which occurred by default due to being present while other head coaches asserted their leadership styles. Relationships and networking were said to be a regular occurrence throughout the participants' coaching journey, and learning can occur through communication with others from different experiences and backgrounds. Most participants expressed how starting from the bottom influenced the HFCs on how to lead and often what not to do. The HCs spoke about how situations and interactions are constantly occurring in a college football program, and by starting from the bottom, coaches can learn how to lead by visualizing to be in that circumstance. The data portrayed how starting a coaching career from the bottom welcomes the challenging journey and molds them into a particular type of leader.

### ***Communicating for Productiveness***

The HFCs asserted the importance of productive communication among team members and expressed how they initiated productive communication among the coaching staff. Common communication topics the HFCs mentioned included expressing team standards, addressing the lack of player development, and ensuring the culture is conveyed. The head coaches mentioned that transparency between the position coach and players helps create open communication during mentoring. When speaking with the participants, they spoke about how guiding student-athletes to succeed is a primary responsibility of the coaching staff, and productive communication is the tool used to ensure teaching lessons are being received and exhibited.

The data showed that productive communication between the HFC and players ensures that athletes are productive team members. The HFCs expressed how they meet with athletes

after the fall season and spring football to discuss status, personal development, and their plans to stay on the team or potentially transfer. If time permits, some coaches mentioned will meet with players more often throughout the year. Some participants said that productive communication occurs between the HFC and players, with discussions involving personal issues, academics, the path to graduation, and essential team requirements as primary topics. The HFCs mentioned that they directly impact productive communication between themselves and all team members, amongst the coaching staff, and between players and coaches.

### ***Head Coaches and Assistant Coaches Leading by Example***

The HFCs portrayed leading by example as a theme that occurs when one exhibits ideal behaviors and consistent actions. By doing so, the head coach presented a perfect way of operating within the program for their assistant coaches to conform. The HFCs expressed that leading by example is a non-verbal method of communicating ideal behavioral standards among the coaching staff. Due to the prolonged engagement between positional coaches and athletes, the HFCs offered that assistant coaches influence players' behavior. The head coaches referred to the actions of a coach can profoundly affect the mentality of players' intrapersonal development. Due to the nature of coaches influencing player behavior, the HFCs insisted their staff members are excellent mentor figures when leading by example. The participants mentioned that leading by example often encompasses portraying a sense of professionalism, respect, and integrity, exhibiting family values, and communicating appropriately. Leading by example was referenced by the sample to occur by default due to the nature of the hierarchy of command in a college football program. The HFCs expressed that they lead all team members with their behavior due to being the highest authority, staff members leading by example for the athletes to follow, and

even upper-class students leading by example for younger athletes to follow in their footsteps shaped by years of guidance and development.

### ***Transparent Communication between the Head Coach and the Athletic Director***

The participants mentioned that the athletic director has the highest authority in every college football setting, even above the head coach. The sample iterated that transparency between the head coach and the athletic director must occur when a significant issue arises. The data supported the notion that numerous issues arise within a college football program; the athletic director must not address every dilemma. Most participants spoke about how legal, financial, or safety issues within the program must be addressed to the athletic director to follow their guidelines on managing the circumstances. When speaking with the sample, the HFCs mentioned how failure to communicate significant issues to the athletic director can result in termination of the HFC. One HFC mentioned that adverse outcomes can arise if the HFC does not address issues with the athletic director, such as a lack of rapport, a sense of untrustworthiness, and a hindrance to the department and the university's reputation. The HFCs stressed that they should immediately address any concerns or doubts regarding an issue with the athletic director. The head coaches spoke about how communication between the HFC and the athletic director should be consistent, transparent, and professional.

### ***Require Buy-In Among Team Members***

When speaking with the participants, they exclaimed that for their leadership strategy to occur, team members must adhere to the vision of the HFC, resulting in the theme of requiring team member buy-in. More importantly, the head coaches insisted that their assistant coaches buy into the HFCs' leadership outlook to achieve a winning outcome. The participants expressed that requiring assistant coach buy-in happens during the hiring process. The head coaches

mentioned that any hired coach should have portrayed a sense of buy-in during the hiring process. By doing so, the participants could ensure that their hired coaches are pre-adhering to the leadership method of the HFC. If the buy-in is not constantly exhibited, the participants fear a counterproductive environment will occur among the coaching staff.

Ensuring buy-in among the athletes was stated as a vital component for the assistant coaches to affect player development. Athletes must abide by the coaching for learning and development to occur. Buy-in among players occurs when relationships are developed and trust is conveyed between coaches and athletes. If players fail to buy-in to the coaching strategies of the staff, skill enhancements fail to occur. For offensive and defensive schemes to be effective, players must buy-in to the plan set by the coordinators and approved by the HFC. The participants mentioned how players who do not buy-in create a hindrance to team production. Requiring buy-in among all team members was a crucial aspect of the HFC's responses to enable their vision for success to be conducted and initiate the plan guiding the team to win.

**Ensuring Team Members are Expressing Ambition.** In conjunction with requiring team members to buy in with the coaching strategies, the sample referenced the concepts of expressing ambition as a sub-theme. Having ambitious team members was mentioned as something used by participants to create perseverance, enthusiasm, and persistence, enabling mental toughness. If assistant coaches lack ambition, some participants are worried that a sense of going through the motions presents itself. The HFCs stated that they can influence the level of ambition the staff administers if the progress of the athletes' skills and abilities is limited. However, some HFCs mentioned that developing student-athletes skills and providing mentorship can be challenging, and ambition creates a persistent approach to its accomplishment.

When speaking with David, he mentioned that student-athletes' responsibilities are extensive. David explained that athletes dedicate twenty hours a week to football-related activities per NCAA guidelines and are enrolled as full-time students. David offered that ambition enables college football players to endure the hardship of the nature of college football while also being full-time college students. Various sample members expressed that ambition creates a burning desire within the student-athletes to maintain enthusiasm, persist in their development, and battle adversity throughout their college football journey. Particular head coaches mentioned that if athletes fail to maintain ambition and as a result, players tend to quit, transfer, or fail to put forth optimal effort. The coaching staff can influence the ambition players administer through communication and mentoring. However, the sample was adamant in stating that the player is responsible for pursuing their activities with positive effort and attitude. Some HFCs stated that with the continuous recruitment of a new recruiting class and mid-year transfers, players who are not progressing and failing to pursue their development with extensive ambition may be surpassed. Expressing ambition was referred to as essential for any student-athlete and necessary for college football players throughout the interviews.

### ***Developing the Mentality of the Student-Athletes***

Intrapersonal development was encompassed by numerous participants for mental development, including but not limited to football-related skills and abilities, mental toughness, emotional intelligence, football-related intelligence, academic success, and personal growth. Learning football-related knowledge was stated to be a “mental” endeavor. Steven and Jacob explained that each athlete moves their body to defeat their opposition in a position-specific approach and that the method in which a player maneuvers their body occurs in the mind. This is why the sample valued position coaches drill fundamental movements and instill techniques

through everyday drills. The sample assured that the objective is to create second-nature techniques to create a foundation of position-applicable development in the subconscious. Numerous participants explained how each player has a thought process when approaching gameplay, which is cultivated in practice; when coaches attempt to enhance players' skills and abilities, it occurs through intrapersonal development so athletes can utilize their learned movements against the will of their competitors.

Aside from learned skills and abilities, participants spoke about how an adequate mentality is often coached. The samples' responses portrayed that learned skills become lackadaisical if techniques and fundamentals are not administered with a dominant-like mentality. Numerous participants expressed that being mentally tough can be mentored and enhanced, although it is not easy to develop an athlete with minimal natural toughness, which is why recruiting has a significant impact on outcomes. Sample members had similar ideologies that intrapersonal player development is the essence of coaching college football. The participants stressed that the coaching staff can convey and exhibit football-related knowledge while cultivating an adequate mental approach for continuous progress, ideal effectiveness, and overall success.

### ***Ensure Assistant Coaches are Coaching Genuinely***

Orchestrating a genuine coaching approach was valued by the sample due to the positive impact on player development. Genuine coaching was portrayed as caring for the athlete, legitimacy, and honesty between the position coach and their athletes. Many head coaches mentioned that genuine coaching enables players to buy-in and trust their coach's tactics for creating intrapersonal development. Various participants exclaimed that the athlete did not care how much a coach knew until the players realized how much the coach cared. Some members

stated that they have seen assistant coaches treat their job as a typical work setting and come to the office to earn a paycheck. Jon mentioned that while the pay incentive is necessary, monetary compensation cannot be the sole motivation for being a coach. Different participants were fond of the idea that when coaches realize their career revolves around improving the player, their coaching effectiveness is enabled. When continuing to question the participants about player development, the participants expressed that for athletes to be developed, players must trust the coach's teachings. Trust between coaches and players occurs when genuine relationships are cultivated between the two parties. A sense of caring for the athlete and valuing them as a person was referenced to create a bond between the teacher and the student. The HFCs were adamant that when assistant coaches exhibit genuine coaching, the athletes begin to trust, respect, and value the guidance of the coach, which ideally allows for optimal development to occur effectively.

### ***Administering Organized Practice with a Periodical Structure***

Conducting a period-based practice is a practice structure that all but one participant utilizes to incorporate segments for an organization. Typically, sample members administered five-minute periods to split practice efficiently. There are practice and weekly activity time constraints as per NCAA guidelines. As a result, the duration of a practice needs to be precise to avoid violating NCAA mandates. By initiating period-based practices, the HFCs stated they can effectively ensure all necessities for team preparation are met while maintaining compliance. Various HFCs explained the numerous aspects of preparing a football team to be successful against competition. Administering a period-based practice effectively allowed the sample to organize the schedule to incorporate essential activities that the head coach dictates. Period-based practice was prevalent among almost all participants' responses due to the time limit for



weekly football activity and the necessity for essential preparation for various aspects of player and team development.

### ***Utilizing the Tight End Position***

Numerous methods exist to structure an offensive scheme in college football. The scheme involves the strategic formation of player personnel and administers a chosen type of offensive attack. Participants offered that the offensive coordinator and the HFC dictate these decisions because of being designated as the primary play-caller. Utilizing tight end personnel as the base offense in college football was typical among the sample. Utilizing tight ends for the base offense provided participants with a versatile athlete. Many HFCs explained that they can stay in eleven or twelve personnel and utilize almost any ideal formation and play call. This gave the sample an advantage for the coordinator due to not having to substitute personnel as often, utilizing an extra blocker, and strategically concealing the tight end for trickery. The tight end position was stated to manipulate the defensive alignments due to the formational alignment of the tight end; the defense will maneuver to compensate for ideal defending. This creates a strategic approach for the participants' offensive attack to attain match-ups due to knowing how the defense will likely align with the tight end's position on the field. Sam expressed that watching opponents' films from past games presented a keen sense of awareness of how the defensive coordinator structures the athletes against certain tight end formations. A tight end base offense provides the sample an advantage for their offensive coordinators to predict defensive alignments for ideal play-calling, enables a variety of formational availability, and creates versatility to utilize the depth of the playbook.

### ***Favoring Man Coverage Over Zone Coverage***

Almost all of the participants said they used a man-defense base coverage. Three HFCs claimed to use zone-defense coverage. While both defense schemes have merit, the sample showed that man-defense coverage could be more dominant. A zone-defense coverage positions the defender to guard areas on the field. As a result, confusion among defenders can occur, areas on the field can be easily exploited, and vacant zones are present. The man-defense coverage initiates a one-versus-one defensive strategy. Various participants justified using man-defense coverage because it creates designated responsibilities where a defender follows specific players to enable precise defending. Eli explained that a man-defense creates limited spatial differentials between the defender and the offensive player, and windows for open players can be quickly diminished by guarding offensive players specifically versus defending a zone on the field. The sample favored the man-defense coverage due to it being more consistent for adequate coverage because each player is guarded. However, one participant mentioned that defenders must be very athletic to keep pace with the offensive player with a one-on-one defensive strategy. One of the HFCs iterated that defenders must run stride for stride with the offensive player, and if the defensive player slips or messes up in any way, a blown coverage can occur. So, while there is some risk in administering man-defense coverage, most participants thought it could be more effective than zone defense at the college level.

### ***Structuring the Foundation of the Team***

Creating the program's foundation was a common idea among the sample to prepare team members for success against competitors. The HFCs expressed that the foundation of a college football program encompasses acquiring excellent team members, the strategic leadership outlook of HFC, and HFC expectations and standards for team members' conduction. The HFCs mentioned that they are directly involved with creating the foundation of the college football

program, and it is their leadership responsibility. The program's foundation allows the participants' leadership outlook to effectively influence the team's outcome. Daniel expressed that this is the reason why when failure persists in a team, the head coach is fired. Failing teams were mentioned to have a poor foundation, as enacted by the HC. The HFCs stated that their leadership is held accountable for failure and praised for success. The sample expressed that their influence over the team's foundation could be blamed if position coaches lack effectiveness in developing athletes, inadequate players are not attained, or the team culture is insufficient. The participants credited their winning teams with a foundation they relied on to succeed. Many sample members mentioned that the foundation of their winning teams involved seeking and attaining professional and effective assistant coaches, recruiting and acquiring highly valued athletes, and developing a reputable team culture. The HFCs' leadership initiative directly influenced these foundational aspects that are the building blocks of a college football program. The success of the sample achieved relied directly on the foundation they had developed.

**Recruiting a Geographic Area Prior to a Specific Position.** When developing the program's foundation, the sample expressed recruiting as an area followed by position-specific recruiting as a sub-theme. Numerous HFCs valued the recruitment process as a primary responsibility for achieving a winning outcome. Attaining adequate players established the core of the participants' team foundation. Players were described as the ones who were competing, so ensuring that ideal players were recruited created an adequate foundation. Recruiting was relied on by sample members to be as significant as coaching due to the impact highly valued recruits have on team production.

The standard initial approach the participants mentioned was to seek and attain quality student-athletes, which required their staff members to recruit a designated geographical area.

This ensured the HFCs that all quality players in regions throughout the university were reviewed and potentially recruited. Out-of-state areas were also stated to be reviewed based on a strategic outlook to attain prospective student-athletes nationwide. When staff members have finalized ideal recruiting prospects, many head coaches mention that the position coach will participate in the recruiting process. Due to a player's direct involvement with their designated position coach, the participants favored that the correlating coach must become a primary member in the recruiting process. The HFCs' rationale was that relationships between the two parties are developed, commonalities are expressed, and the prospective athlete can decipher if that coach is ideal to be their teacher by choosing that institution. Requiring staff members to recruit a designated geographical area is a highly effective tactic stated the whole sample to seek all potentially ideal prospective athletes.

### ***Coaching for the Player Development***

A consistent response among the sample was that progressing athletes' skills and abilities was to be achieved by the staff administering strategic developmental coaching. Different HCs explained that developing a college football player is a process that spans multiple years. Steven mentioned that athletes' development encompasses position-related techniques, instilling offensive or defensive schematics, cultivating an ideal mentality for success against the competition, ensuring academic success, and influencing personal growth. Developmental coaching is a primary role of assistant coaches and was monitored by the participants. Recruiting was described as a significant aspect of creating a winning team, and it is critical that players are being developed to progress positional skills and abilities for optimal production. The participants stated that first-year students declare a "red shirt" year, during which athletes compete in four games or less to reserve a year of playing eligibility. The "red shirt" year was

favored among sample members due to allowing players to develop and catch up fundamentally, technically, and mentally with older athletes. Some sample responses mentioned that the HFC monitors player development and often addresses assistant coaches whose players are not exhibiting ideal progress. Developmental coaching is described as how coaches enhance players' skills and abilities.

**Ensuring Assistant Coaches Exhibit Professionalism.** This sub-theme was expressed in correlation to developmental coaching. Professional coaching was described as a method for effective developmental coaching. Some sample members provided that professional aspects of coaching included the coaches' intelligence, behavior, communication, effectiveness in progressing players' skills and abilities, and collaborating well with other staff members. Exhibiting professional coaching is required and sought within the interview process the participants administered. The HFCs explained that their staff members who do not convey professional coaching might diminish the team's culture, limit player development, create a losing outcome, enable a high transfer rate among athletes, cause coaching staff drama, encourage coaches to have personal hidden agendas, encourage coaches who refuse to follow HFC leadership guidelines, and may result in potential university or legal violations could occur. Most college football programs have a public presence, and participants fear that unprofessional coaches could draw unideal attention toward the team and the university.

***Express and Ensure Team Expectations are Understood by Team Members***

This primary theme was prevalent among the whole sample. There are over one hundred athletes in a college football program with a range of ten to thirty staff members. The HFCs understood that they were in a leading position where initiating leadership to guide the team to success was a primary responsibility. The samples' leadership incorporates the standards and

expectations of team members. This was described as the foundation for the culture of the team. The culture was described as the team members' habits and how players and coaches conduct themselves. Numerous participants spoke about how their guidelines drive the culture for staff members' and athletes' behavior. The importance of understanding their expectations was conveyed for HFCs' leadership outlook and culture to be administered. The participants' responses were concise so that staff members could understand the HFC standards and the expectations that should be followed in the hiring process. Ben mentioned that there should be zero tolerance for coaches who fail to understand and administer the expectations of the HFC. Many participants worried that failure to exhibit an understanding of the HFCs standards could result in counter-productiveness, and termination could occur for coaches who continuously fail to exhibit an understanding of the HFCs' expectations and standards.

Athletes were also stated to obey the expectations of the HFC. Staff members were referenced as enforcing the HFC standards on the athletes. The recruitment process was a tool many participants utilized to attain ideal athletes who portrayed an obedient mentality to follow rules, regulations, and team standards. The HFCs' responsibility was stated to enact team expectations, ensure staff members and athletes understand them, and ensure that all members constantly portray ideal behavior. This is referred to as the culture of the team.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Several implications are derived from this study. Below are implications for policy and practice related to successful college HFC leadership. In addition, theoretical and empirical implications are discussed, along with the study's limitations and delimitations.

Recommendations for future research are expressed to support applicable research development. The conclusions finalize this hermeneutic phenomenological study.

### ***Implications for Policy***

The implications for policy regarding HFCs leadership strategies are projected for the athletic director who oversees the football program. Policy for hiring, monitoring, and terminating the HFC is implied through the research design and thematic findings. When athletic directors are searching for a head coach to hire, potential applicants should seek the ideal qualities of a winning HFC. The findings suggest that athletic directors should seek applicants who rely on their leadership initiative to guide followers to success, value the importance of acquiring a professional staff and adequate student-athletes, and progress in their team to reach championship endeavors. Ideal coaching leadership characteristics are associated with the leadership initiative of a winning college HFC and should be sought by the athletic director within the hiring process. Research findings imply that the causes for failure include but are not limited to failing to have productive communication, not leading by example, not having team member buy-in, and failing athlete intrapersonal development. The athletic director may warrant termination if the HFC and staff are not orchestrating genuine coaching, players are not being developed, and the program's foundation lacks legitimacy and proper structure.

### ***Implications for Practice***

The implications for practice in this study may be able to enhance fellow college HFC's leadership strategies. The effectiveness of the leadership initiative described by the sample is supported by the proven recent wins the participants have achieved. College HFCs from any competitive level may incorporate effective leadership, successful program development, and cultivating a productive team environment to enhance how leadership initiatives aid in pursuing a winning outcome. In addition, individuals seeking to become a college HFC may also be molded by adhering to the thematic findings in this study. Rather than learning from failure,

individuals who are new to the HFC position may utilize ideal leadership strategies to guide their team members, enable a professional coaching approach among staff members, and value to the student-athletes to help build the foundation of their leadership initiative—due to the effectiveness of the findings for the participants, proven winning leadership initiatives, and aid coaches who are seeking to be an HFC or lack extensive HFC experience.

Head coaches in other sports may also embrace effective leadership strategies to guide their team members, enable a professional coaching approach among staff members, and value the student-athletes to achieve a winning outcome. Leadership strategies for achieving ideal progress, developing effective team members, and enabling student-athletes to achieve optimal development may be used by HCs in other sports who seek a winning outcome. If winning is not achieved, HCs may also utilize these leadership initiatives in other team sports to enhance their leadership initiative to potentially be more successful in competition. The HFCs rely on their leadership initiative to guide their followers to success, and any HC may also benefit significantly from administering a similar outlook to that of leading team members to a winning outcome.

Aside from the implication that HFCs and HCs of other sports can adopt the winning leadership initiatives expressed in the findings, leaders of non-sport organizations may also utilize them. By initiating an effective approach to guide and mentor followers to succeed, leaders in non-sport organizations can utilize leadership strategies from the participants who have proven to be effective leaders who were able to guide their organizations to succeed in their respective fields. While the sample incorporated winning college HFCs, their leadership initiatives contained methods to acquire quality team members and cultivate a progressive environment. The sense of team building, mentoring, and leading the organization to succeed



was implied in the sample responses. Non-sport organizational leaders, managers, small business owners, principals, athletic directors, and entrepreneurs may be able to use various thematic topics to create a thriving leadership environment in their industry.

### **Empirical and Theoretical Implications**

Implications regarding empirical and theoretical data derived from the findings and the empirical alignment with the thematic findings examined will be discussed. In addition, the results will be correlated to the theoretical framework of transformational leadership. Theoretical and empirical implications provide applicable context relating to the research topic. These implications are essential for filling gaps in the literature and providing support for the theoretical foundation. Below, empirical and theoretical implications are discussed.

#### ***Empirical Implications***

The empirical literature presents relevancy and values effective leadership for organizational success. There is plenty of empirical literature related to non-football leadership positions, and this study was designed to fill the gap associated with the literature on leadership among successful college HFCs. This study focused on identifying leadership styles of winning college head football coaches. There is little research regarding leadership initiatives for winning college HFCs in the NCAA. Although, in alignment with acquiring adequate team members, related literature exhibits the importance of ideal organizational workers to carry out workplace responsibilities (Ciampolini et al., 2019; Gordon, 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Oregon, 2019). Furthermore, literature described the importance of productive communication to ensure organizational values and essentials are conveyed and understood among team members (Cranmer et al., 2018; Cranmer et al., 2020; Cushion, 2018; Ferrar et al., 2018; Preston et al., 2021; Van Raalte et al., 2019). Most research regarding effective leadership was about managers

in various professional industries, principals, academic teachers, and leaders in non-athletic industry sectors. However, some athletic-related literature described initiating leadership to guide followers to success as a head coach's responsibility (Arthur et al., 2017). This study fills the gap in literature relating to leading effectively by presenting the thematic findings derived from current college HFCs in the NCAA that have had recent outstanding success proven through an excessive winning percentage.

Transformational leadership theory describes the roles of an HFC and the methods by which a college football head coach can guide team members to succeed (Allen et al., 2016; Ausat et al., 2022; Bass, 1995; Berkovich, 2016; Boamah et al., 2018; Hickman, 2018; Liu, 2019; Udin, 2020). The head coach's importance was discussed in various articles, along with the value of enacting an ideal team culture and how it relates to the theme of developing team cohesiveness (Brook, 2021; Leeds, 2020; Vaughan et al., 2021). The successful leadership approach described by winning HFCs encompasses literature that focuses on coaching success (Leeds, 2020; Sleeman, 2020; Williams, 2020). There is sufficient research regarding athletics and leadership in sports and non-sport organizations. However, regarding success as a college HFC achieving wins, this research helps fill a gap in literature where this area of discussion is scarce.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

The theoretical framework for this study was the Four I's of Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1995). The framework was used as a theoretical guide to identify the lived experiences of winning college HFCs' method of leadership. This theory's methods presented the causal approach to administering effective transformational leadership. The thematic findings

present the methods of leadership winning college HFCs administer to attain successful outcomes and depict the theoretical framework.

This hermeneutical phenomenological research supports the effectiveness of the TL framework and presents a range of usages. TL theory can be a basis for leadership methods for head coaches of team sports. Its usage has proven valid and applicable to cultivating HFC's winning leadership approach. The theoretical framework shaped the outlook for research conduction, objectives, the central and sub-research questions, data collection methods, and data analysis. The framework guided research and aligned the findings of the phenomenon to the theoretical implications. Table 7 and Appendix J correlate the implication of thematic findings with the theoretical framework.

**Table 7**

*Theoretical Applications*

Intellectual Stimulation	Individualized Consideration
Productive communication Intrapersonal player development Developmental coaching	Address issues with the athletic director Understanding expectations
Idealized Influence	Inspirational Motivation
Initiate leadership to guide followers to success Acquiring adequate team members Starting coaching career from the bottom Require buy-in Period based practice Tight end base offense Man-defense coverage Create the foundation of the program	Set short-term goals Leading by example

**Intellectual Stimulation.** The theoretical framework utilizes intellectually stimulating team members to invest in organizational success. The sample continuously iterated how players are recruited and developed to cultivate optimal productivity when competing. Many HCs expressed interest in using productive communication to guide and develop their athletes. Player development was also a prevalent theme that created an intellectual influence on players’ personal growth and enhanced skills and abilities.

**Individualized Considerations.** The framework correlating data collection with individualized consideration was less common than in other framework sectors. Individualized considerations occurred when managing player issues and consequences by communicating with

the athletic director. Additionally, ensuring each team member understands the expectations enacted by the HFC aligns with the framework.

**Idealized Influence.** This sector of the theoretical framework was the most prominent among the Four I's of TL theory. Administering an ideal influential leadership outlook was an initiative that was highly valued among the participants' responses. Idealized influence allowed the head coaches to initiate leadership strategically. It was the effect each participating HFC could have on team members by mandating an ideal foundation for the organization. The sample relied upon the idealized influence to assert their leadership outlook for team success.

**Inspirational Motivation.** Inspirational motivation is a method of administering strategic leadership to influence team members to put forth the necessary effort for continued development. Avoiding stagnant progress and athlete failure was an objective among the participants' responses. The HCs sought to create a sense of motivation through various tactics. A common topic of discussion among the HFC's responses was caring for the athletes to assert motivation by inspiration.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Issues can arise from all approaches to conducting research. Limitations and delimitations are present among research conditions and are specific to the research style and the topic being studied. Limitations are potential weaknesses not in the research's control, and delimitations are issues that can arise during the methodology that are within the researcher's control. This section discusses the limitations and delimitations of this study.

#### ***Limitations***

This research topic aimed to identify successful leadership methods that winning college HFCs initiate. The sample consisted of NCAA college football coaches who had had significant

wins, so the study required a criterion-based sample. A limitation that was significantly impactful was the time frame for collecting data. College head football coaches are extremely busy throughout the year. In the fall, HFCs are in season competition, and the winter is a primary time for recruiting. Spring football practice occupies most of March through May, and recruiting is also heavily conducted. In the Summer, HFCs take time off to be with their families and recruit needed positions. The end of Spring and the beginning of Summer was when most data collection took place due to the open availability of the HFCs. Therefore, this limitation hindered the availability of the participants and created a shortened window for data collection.

Another limitation in data collection was receiving thorough participant responses regarding their leadership initiative. For confidentiality reasons, two participants did not want to be as transparent as the other sample members. Other participants were under strict time constraints due to busy schedules and were not as thorough with their responses as others. While the participants answered every interview question, some responses were concise and direct. This scenario only occurred for the four of the participants. The primary limitations of this research made obtaining qualitative data challenging, but through perseverance, data was collected successfully.

### ***Delimitations***

One delimitation in the study was obtaining qualified college HFCs. Committee and cohort members suggested adjusting the research topic to assistant coaches rather than HFCs because they are more readily available. Mandating that winning college HFCs be the sample for research conduction was a major delimitation, and the completion of this hermeneutic phenomenological research was postponed due to the extreme difficulties in the sample acquisition.

Another delimitation was the specificity of the criterion-based sample. Limiting participant qualifications to being in the NCAA and having a significant winning percentage created a delimitation that caused major difficulties. Instead, junior college coaches and high school coaches were included as ideal participants; attaining enough HFCs would be more plausible. However, attaining specifically NCAA college football head coaches enabled the attainment of precious leadership insight. The NCAA is a reputable, competitive level where coaches are highly paid and valued. Lower-level coaches may not carry as much expertise naturally.

In addition, requiring the sample to have a winning percentage that ranks in the top half of the conference limited potential participants significantly. Roughly one hundred college coaches qualified to be a member of the criterion-based sample, which was a major delimitation. However, requiring a significant winning percentage among the participants ensured that leadership data was valuable due to proven success. If HFCs had not proven recent success, their leadership insight would not be as valid by default. These definitions occurred because the research topic focused on identifying winning leadership initiatives among successful college HFCs.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings in this study encourage researchers to further identify successful leadership methods among leaders of various industries. Limited research on winning leadership methods college coaches utilize in other sports is available. Winning leadership methods administered by college head coaches in D1 basketball should be studied. Due to the value and growing popularity of competing in March Madness, D1 college basketball coaches who earn a ticket to the tournament should be studied for their effective leadership methods. In addition, college head

coaches who experience significant winning outcomes in college volleyball, baseball, women's basketball, and softball can also be identified.

Research on leadership methods of winning head coaches in the National Football League, National Basketball Association, Major League Baseball, and National Hockey League would present valuable leadership data. Athletic head coaches in professional leagues carry immense value and significantly influence amateur leagues. A sense of professional leadership can be conveyed by identifying how professional head coaches lead their programs. Researching professional sports head coaching leadership can be difficult due to their exclusiveness, but obtaining professional head coaching data can be highly impactful.

In addition, leaders in non-athletic industries can also be researched using this study's methodology and procedures. Leadership methods of successful leaders in non-athletic organizations can be identified and presented for current and future leaders to adopt. How a successful leader conducts their organization can adhere to other industries. An effective leader in one sector of the non-athletic industry may utilize leadership techniques that can be applied by another leader in related or non-related sectors of the industry. Shared leadership knowledge can benefit leaders in different professions, and research can add to the empirical literature.

These recommendations for future studies provide advice for researchers seeking to identify successful leaders' lived experiences in athletic and non-athletic organizations. By doing so, leaders can enhance their skills and abilities to create an optimal workplace environment. Failing organizations often occur, bankruptcy can be expected, and new leaders are continuously hired. By researching effective leadership in athletic and non-athletic organizations, current and future leaders can learn from successful styles of leading and adhere to what is working for leaders in various industry sectors in our modern era.



## Conclusion

The problem is that some college head football coaches fail to develop and prepare student-athletes for success while earning significant financial gain. The purpose of this study was to discover and interpret the winning leadership methods among successful college head football coaches to offer applicable leadership strategies that are proven to be effective. The use of the Bass (1995) transformational leadership provided the theoretical framework for the study. Data collection consisted of individual interviews, completing a protocol writing prompt, and administering a focus group discussion. Thirteen participants were recruited for the research. Twelve college football head coaches participated in the interview, eleven head coaches completed the writing prompt, and four participated in the group discussion. After data collection, Van Manen's (2016) data analysis methods were utilized to identify the research findings. The selective method was utilized to analyze the individual interviews, the detailed approach was used to analyze the writing prompt, and the holistic method was used. Based on the Van Manen (2017) framework, sixteen primary themes and five sub-themes from the participants' responses. The primary themes are (a) initiating leadership to guide followers to success, (b) acquiring adequate team members, (c) setting short-term goals, (d) starting a coaching career from the bottom, (e) productive communication, (f) leading by example, (g) addressing issues to the athletic director, (h) requiring buy-in, (i) intrapersonal player development, (j) orchestra genuine coaching, (k) period based practice, (l) tight end base offense, (m) man-defense coverage, (n) create the foundation of the program, (o) developmental coaching, and (p) understanding expectations. The five sub-themes are (a) developing team cohesiveness, (b) positive relationships among team members, (c) expressing ambition, (d) area recruiting, (e) position recruiting, and (f) professional coaching. The derived themes present the

blueprint for leading a college football program to a winning outcome. Winning leaders rely on their initiative and insight to create and achieve organizational success. A successful leader utilizes knowledge from gained experiences and credible sources to administer leadership and guide team members to achieve organizational objectives.

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## Appendix A

### Liberty University IRB Approval

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 21, 2023

Valin Kattoula  
Darren Howland

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1715 IDENTIFYING LEADERSHIP STYLES AMONG  
WINNING COLLEGE  
HEAD FOOTBALL COACHES: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Valin Kattoula, Darren Howland,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of

continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP  
Administrative Chair

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent

**Title of the Project:** Identifying Leadership Styles Among Winning College Head Football Coaches: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study

**Principal Investigator:** Valin H. Kattoula, Doctoral Student, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a current college football head coach in the NCAA, with a winning percentage average over the last three seasons (2019, 2021, 2022; Excludes Covid season;) that ranks in the top half of the conference of competition. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to discover and interpret successful leadership approaches from winning college head football coaches to express effective leadership styles that enable a winning outcome in college football.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Individual Interview. Participants will be scheduled for a 30–45-minute recorded audio and video individual interview, which will take place and be transcribed through Microsoft Teams.
2. Protocol Writing. The participant will be asked to complete a 350-500 word writing prompt following the completion of the individual interview.
3. Focus Group Interview. Four participants will be asked to participate in a 30–45-minute focus group discussion. Focus group participants will be randomly selected following the interview and protocol writing. The focus group discussion will take place and be transcribed through Microsoft Teams.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study; however, participants can reaffirm and enhance their current leadership philosophy by expanding on their explanatory perspective. Participants that partake in the focus group discussion may also benefit from fellow college HFCs presenting credible personal leadership strategies.

Benefits to society may include increased understanding regarding winning leadership strategies successful college HFCs use. The study will assist current and future HFCs in developing and enhancing personal leadership methods based on what has proven to be effective for current HFCs.

### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses to questions, focus group, and protocol writing will be kept confidential using pseudonyms for names of HFCs and institutions.
- Interviews will be conducted where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Setting for interviews and focus group discussions are conducted through Microsoft Teams for privacy and accessibility. No other person will be present during the interview process other than the individual participant and the researcher.
- Data will be stored on a personal password-protected hard drive and will be stored to be used in future research. After 5 years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hard copy records will be shredded.
- Interview and focus groups will be transcribed for the researcher's private use and will be stored on a personal password-protected hard drive for 5 years until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting. While highly discouraged, other participants in the focus group may share discussions with persons outside of the focus group.

### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

### **Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Valin H. Kattoula. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Darren Howland, at [REDACTED].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, [REDACTED]; our phone number is [REDACTED], and our email address is [REDACTED]

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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Printed Subject Name

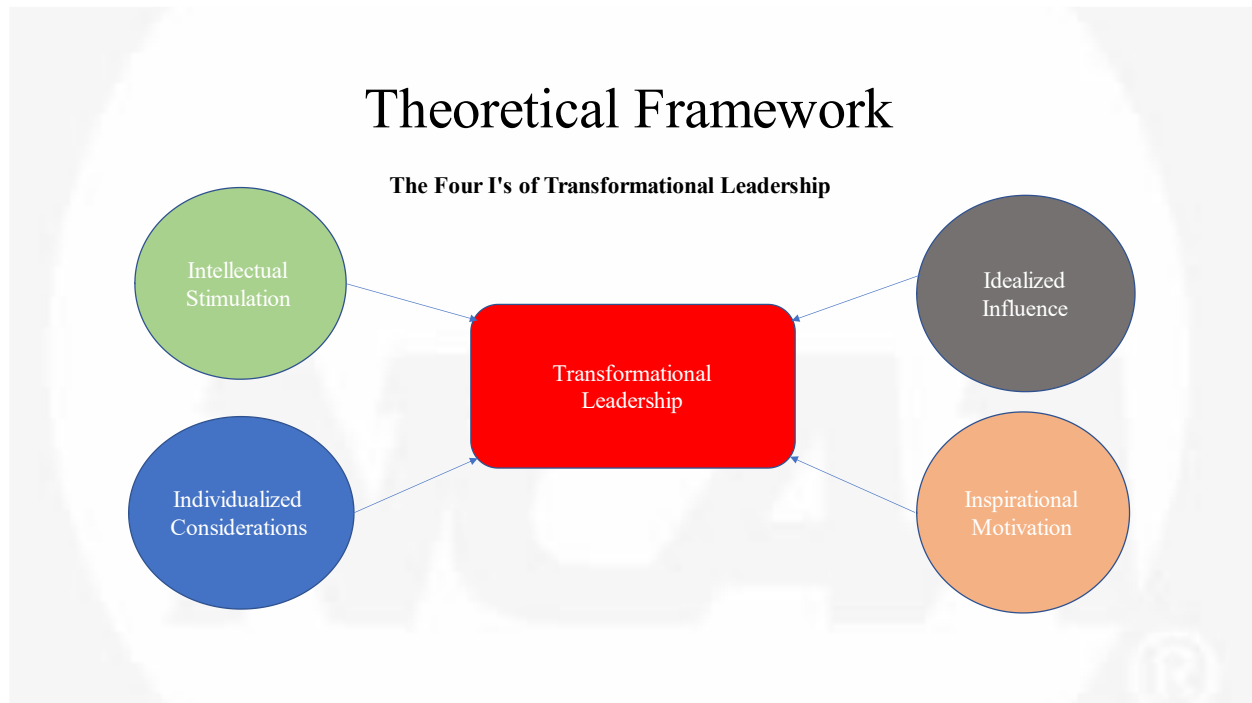
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Signature & Date

## Appendix C

### The Four I's of Transformational Leadership

**Figure 1**

*The Four I's of Transformational Leadership*





## Appendix D

### Participants Interview Questions

**Table 1**

*Individual Interview Questions*

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1. Please describe the coaching history that led you to your current HFC position. CRQ
  2. What are some methods by which you prepare and inspire student-athletes to meet team expectations? SQ3
  3. How would you describe your influence on your assistant coach's team member interactions? SQ2
  4. How would you describe the approach your assistant coaches should influence student-athletes? SQ2
  5. What methods do you administer to inspire staff members and coaches to execute your program outlook? SQ3
  6. Please explain the primary team departments that require your leadership input. CRQ
  7. Please describe and explain the concept of goal setting in your leadership. CRQ
  8. How does your influence shape the culture of your team? SQ2
  9. Please explain how the team culture inspires team members. SQ3
  10. Please describe how your leadership influences the staff members' behavior and conduct. SQ1
  11. What is your leadership towards developing and preparing student-athletes? SQ1
  12. What is your coaching philosophy regarding teaching, developing, and preparing student-athletes for success? SQ4

13. Please describe the influence of your leadership practices that have contributed to a winning team outcome. CRQ

14. Please explain the significance of leadership for winning as a college HFC. CRQ

15. What procedures do you follow to manage unfortunate team member circumstances?

SQ1

16. How has your leadership shaped your delivery as an HFC? CRQ

**Appendix E**  
**Focus Group Questions**

**Table 2**

*Focus Group Questions*

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1. What are some areas in a college football program that require the HFC's direct leadership input/management? CRQ
  2. How would you describe the coaching philosophy for you and your positional coaches? SQ4
  3. What are some methods for winning consistently in a college football program? CRQ
  4. Please describe some effective team member motivational strategies. SQ3
  5. What are some methods used to prepare and inspire your assistant coaches? SQ3
  6. What is your influence on the conduction of your assistant coaches? SQ2
  7. How do you oversee and manage all departments within the football program? CRQ
  8. How many individual meetings do you have with your student-athletes, and what do you discuss? SQ1
  9. How often do you meet with your coordinators and positional coaches, and what do you discuss? SQ1
  10. If you could share one piece of advice for a college HFC, what would it be? CRQ

**Appendix F****Protocol Writing Prompt****Table 3***Protocol Writing Prompt*

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Please write in 250-500 words about an impactful leadership experience that has contributed to a winning team.

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## Appendix G

### Participants

**Table 4**

*Participants*

Participant Name	Division	Conference
Jim	D1-FCS	Ohio Valley
Daniel	D1-FBS	BIG 10
Ben	D2	Great Lakes Valley
David	D2	Gulf South
Tom	D1-FBS	Mid-American
Jacob	D2	Gulf South
Eli	D2	Great Lakes Valley
Jon	D2	Great American
Sam	D1-FCS	Southern
Jay	D1-FCS	Southern
Gary	D1-FBS	BIG 12
Steven	D1-FCS	Missouri Valley
Malcolm	D2	Rocky Mountain

*Note:* The “D” means Division, and the number after refers to the competition level. “FBS” is stated in the abbreviation as Football Bowl Sub-division, and “FCS” is for Football Conference Sub-division.

## Appendix H

### Themes and Sub-Themes

**Table 5**

*Themes and Sub-Themes*

Themes	Sub-Themes
Initiate leadership to guide followers to success	Develop team cohesiveness Positive relationships among team members
Acquiring adequate team members	
Set short-term goals	
Started coaching career from the bottom	
Productive communication	
Leading by example	
Address issues to the Athletic Director	
Require buy-in	Express ambition
Intrapersonal player development	
Orchestrate genuine coaching	
Period based practice	
Tight end base offense	
Man-defense coverage	
Create the foundation of the program	Area recruiting followed by position recruiting
Developmental coaching	Professional Coaching
Understanding of expectations	

## Appendix I

### Research Questions and Thematic Alignment

**Table 6**

*Research Questions and Thematic Alignment*

Themes	Sub-Themes	Research Question
Initiate leadership to guide followers to success		Central Research Question
	Develop team cohesiveness	Central Research Question
	Positive relationships among team members	Central Research Question
Acquiring adequate team members		Central Research Question
Set short-term goals		Central Research Question
Started coaching career from the bottom		Central Research Question
Productive communication		Sub Question 1
Leading by example		Sub Question 1
Address issues to the Athletic Director		Sub Question 1
Require buy-in		Sub Question 2
	Express ambition	Sub Question 2
Intrapersonal player development		Sub Question 2
Orchestrate genuine coaching		Sub Question 2
Period based practice		Sub Question 3
Tight end base offense		Sub Question 3
Man-defense coverage		Sub Question 3
Create the foundation of the program		Sub Question 3

	Area recruiting followed by	
	position recruiting	Sub Question 3
Developmental coaching		Sub Question 4
	Professional coaching	Sub Question 4
Understanding of expectations		Sub Question 4

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## Appendix J

### Theoretical Applications

**Table 7**

*Theoretical Applications*

<b>Intellectual Stimulation</b>	<b>Individualized Consideration</b>
Productive communication Intrapersonal player development Developmental coaching	Address issues with the athletic director Understanding expectations
<b>Idealized Influence</b>	<b>Inspirational Motivation</b>
Initiate leadership to guide followers to success Acquiring adequate team members Starting coaching career from the bottom Require buy-in Period based practice Tight end base offense Man-defense coverage Create the foundation of the program	Set short-term goals Leading by example