Intercollegiate athletic departments face a number of challenges in the new millennium. Among the most pressing issues is financial sustainability. According to a recent National Collegiate Athletic Association Revenues and Expenses of Division I Intercollegiate Athletics Programs Report all but twenty-four of the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) level college athletic programs reported an annual operating deficit, despite substantial subsidies allocated by the institutions (Fulks, 2015). A major source of expenditures for FBS member universities and their athletic programs over the past twenty years has been significant investments in facility construction and renovation projects (Jozsa Jr., 2013). Citing figures provided by the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, Yost (2010) suggests the pursuit of lavish athletic facilities (“facility arms race”) continues to be a significant economic concern shared by all program stakeholders, including coaches, university presidents, endowment administrators, and the NCAA. To offset rising program costs and to maximize their return on investments (ROI) many college athletic departments seek to capitalize on each stadium related revenue stream, including facility lease agreements year round (Jozsa Jr., 2013; Yost, 2010). In general, outdoor sports stadiums host a variety of special events year round (Ammon Jr., Southall, Nagel, 2010; Lee, Kim, & Parrish, 2012). However, few studies have investigated this phenomenon at the intercollegiate level. Specifically, the authors are not aware of any studies that investigate how these venues are perceived from the perspective of event/meeting planners.

A site, or a host facility, is often a key factor that influences the overall success of an event or meeting (Bowdin, McDonnell, Allen, & O’Toole, 2006). The literature on event and meeting site selection is well developed and provides valuable insights on the attributes, features, and services valued most by the event/meeting planners with the capacity to make decisions on which facility to select as a site for an event (Crouch and Ritchie, 1998; Del Chiappa, 2013; DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf, & Godlewska, 2008; Draper, Dawson, & Casey, 2011; Elston & Draper, 2012; Oppermann, 1996; Rompf, Breiter, & Severt, 2008). However, literature on event and meeting site selection criteria as it pertains to unique non-traditional venues is developing (Daniels, Lee, and Cohen, 2012; Fawzy, 2008; Lau and Hui, 2010; Lee, Parrish, & Kim, 2015; Phillips & Geddie, 2005). Therefore, the focus of this study is the perception of the key event/meeting site selection attributes outlined in the literature as they pertain to a specific outdoor FBS level college football stadium.

A qualitative research design was used as this methodology is particularly useful in gaining access to participant perceptions (Patton, 2002). Specifically, this study examined the initial perceptions of a specific outdoor FBS level stadium (setting) as an event venue from the perspective of eight participants as well as how these participants perceived a pre-determined set of fifteen conceptual schemes related to site selection attributes grounded in the existing literature.

Findings suggest the participants initially perceived the stadium as suitable mainly for larger outdoor events (i.e. concerts, trade shows, festivals) and not smaller corporate meetings or social events. Also, participants perceived food and beverage service at the stadium and the venue’s reputation as an event and meeting venue negatively. However, perceptions of venue location and accessibility, safety and security, promotional appeal and attractiveness, availability,
support services, environmental sustainability, parking, and uniqueness were consistently positive across the eight participants. Finally, event and meeting planner perceptions varied with respect to cost, technology, venue layout and flexibility, and venue quality.

In consideration of the findings from this study, knowledge of the site selection literature, and industry experience, the researchers suggest that once the negative perceptions (food/beverage and reputation as event venue) are mitigated, the stadium in this particular study is well positioned to generate supplemental revenue for the university’s athletic department by capitalizing on the local events and meetings industry. Specifically, the stadium possesses many of the required site selection features and services planners deem important when selecting a primary host venue and the participants interviewed indicated positive perceptions about most of these items.

References


