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Pipeline Project - 2024 Employment Overview - NCAA Football Bowl Subdivisions

Theme:
Leadership

 Pipeline Project - 2024 Employment Overview - NCAA Football Bowl Subdivisions

Co-authored by Meg G. Hancock, Nicholas Kopka, & Ehren R. Green, University of Louisville

Over the past decade (2015-2024), athletic departments within NCAA Football Bowl Subdivisions (FBS), Power 4 (Autonomy) and Group of 5 (Non-Autonomy) institutions, have seen significant growth in leadership roles. More than 1,000 new assistant and associate athletic director (AD) positions have been added (1). Specifically, assistant AD roles have increased by 80%, while associate AD positions have grown by 43%. This expansion reflects both the overall growth of athletic departments and new opportunities for staff to develop leadership skills.

Notably, women's representation in these roles has also grown, though not quite at the same pace as the positions themselves. In 2015, women held 29.7% of assistant AD roles and 25% of associate AD roles. By 2024, those numbers have risen to 35% and 31% (2), respectively. While this shows progress—women have gained around 6% in both categories—these increases are still modest compared to the overall growth of the positions.

Moreover, only 11.7% of FBS athletic departments are led by women. This data suggests women are systematically underrepresented and continue to encounter barriers to advancement in intercollegiate athletic departments.

The Pipeline Project is a study on the state of women in intercollegiate athletic administration. Historically, the “pipeline” has referred to title positions of assistant athletic director and associate athletic director (3). Individuals holding senior-level positions are perceived to be more likely to achieve an Athletic Director position because the skill sets associated with senior-level administration, such as budgeting, fundraising, and supervisory responsibility, are perceived to be more transferable to the position of Athletic Director (4). This report extends the pipeline to look at all job areas and four managerial tiers (i.e.g, entry-level, mid-tier I, mid-tier II, executive; see page 6 for definitions) as the representation of women throughout athletic departments is critical to understand how the pipeline flows and contributes to representation.

For this inaugural report, we analyzed data for all NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions designated as Power 4 and Group of 5 to better understand how and where women are represented in intercollegiate athletic department staff structures and leadership. The Pipeline Project offers an in-depth look at how men and women are distributed across athletic department roles (excluding head coaches and coaching staffs) with specific emphasis on managerial progression and job areas associated with a pipeline to athletic department leadership.

A key goal of the project is to uncover "leaks" in the talent pipeline, where women are systematically underrepresented (5) or encounter barriers to advancement (6). These leaks occur both within specific job areas and at critical career stages (entry-level, mid-level tier I and II, and executive roles), underscoring a broader issue of gender equity in college sports leadership.

The Pipeline Project serves as a vital resource for those committed to advancing gender equity in intercollegiate athletics. It provides athletic administrators, professional organizations, and sports managers with data-driven insights into gender representation, employment trends, and diversity within leadership structures. Moreover, it acts as a benchmarking tool, allowing institutions to compare their progress in achieving gender equity against others. Athletic department and industry leaders can identify gaps and develop strategies to create more inclusive and equitable pathways for women. The Pipeline Project also encourages researchers and educators to use its data for future research on gender dynamics in college sports leadership. This focus on gender equity is essential for building a sustainable, diverse leadership pipeline in college athletics—one where women have equal opportunities to advance, lead, and shape the future of the industry.

[Click here to go to the website](#) or download the report below.

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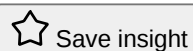
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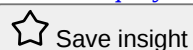


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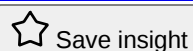


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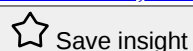


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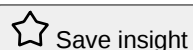
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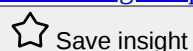
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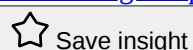


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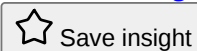
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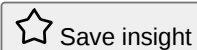


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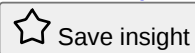
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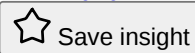
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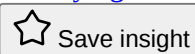
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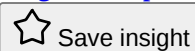
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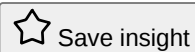
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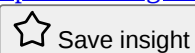
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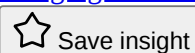
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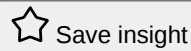
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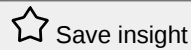


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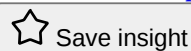


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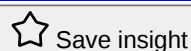


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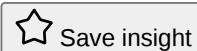
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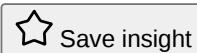
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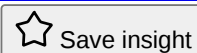
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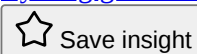
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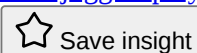
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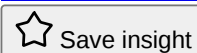
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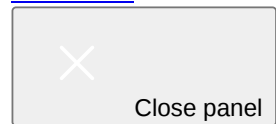
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