



The Pipeline Project

2025 Athletic Department Staffing Trends
NCAA Football Bowl Subdivisions (FBS)

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Meet the Team



Dr. Meg Hancock (she/they), an associate professor at the University of Louisville, is passionate about gender and diversity in the workplace. With 40+ publications and 50+ conference presentations, Meg aims to create inclusive and inspiring communities within sports organizations. She helps individuals achieve career goals in collegiate and professional sports. Outside work, Meg enjoys coffee, outdoor activities, and traveling with spouse Bridget, and their dogs, Chaco and Roux.



Nick Kopka (he/him), a doctoral candidate at the University of Louisville, is researching the social impact of sport tourism. Before pursuing his doctoral degree, he gained experience with the Louisville Sports Commission, the 500 Festival, and the Shreveport-Bossier Sports Commission. He has experience in event management, sales, volunteer recruitment, and budget oversight. He is an alum of Ball State University (BS) Ohio University (MBA, MS).



Dr. Ehren Green (she/her), an assistant professor at Temple University, has a deep passion for creating positive work environments in sports organizations. As a former student-athlete, intercollegiate athletics employee, and spouse of a coach, sports run in her blood. She's also a proud mom and enjoys dominating on the soccer field with her 2 boys. When not playing soccer, they're busy planning their next travel adventures. In addition to her love for sports, she enjoys good comedies and engaging conversations.

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About The Pipeline Project

From 2015 to 2024 athletic departments within NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions across the Power 4 (autonomous) and Group of 5 (non-autonomous) conferences experienced substantial growth in organizational capacity. More than 1,000 new assistant and associate athletic director (AD) positions were added during this period (NCAA, 2024), with assistant AD roles increasing by 80% and associate AD roles by 43%. This expansion reflects the broadening operational scope of athletic departments and the emergence of new pathways for staff to develop leadership skills.

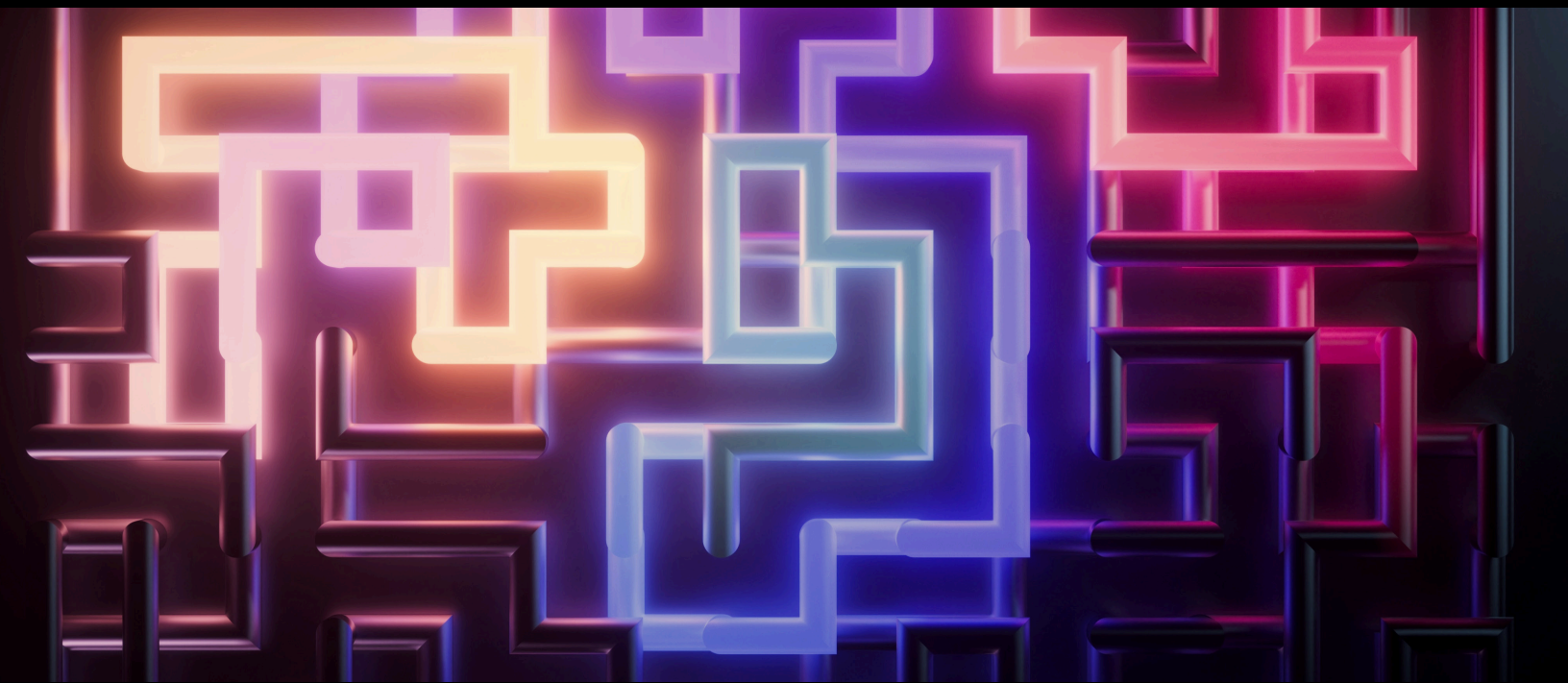
This report examines how staffing is structured across athletic departments, including the distribution of roles, the progression of career stages, and the pathways that commonly lead to executive leadership positions. Historically, assistant and associate AD roles have been considered central to preparing individuals for the athletic director position because they often encompass responsibilities such as budgeting, fundraising, contract oversight, and sport supervision. This study extends that focus to all job areas and four career tiers (early/mid-career, middle management, senior management, and executive) to better understand how leadership capacity develops across an entire department.

An analysis of gender is also included to provide additional context about workforce composition. For example, between 2015 and 2024, women's representation in assistant and associate AD roles increased from 29.7 to 35 percent and from 25 to 31 percent, respectively. Still, men occupy roughly 70% of positions perceived to be critical for advancement to the athletic director chair. While these changes indicate shifting workforce patterns, demographic information is presented as context rather than evaluation.

The Pipeline Project is designed as a resource for athletic administrators, researchers, and industry professionals engaged in workforce planning and leadership development. The data support benchmarking against peer institutions, inform strategic staffing decisions, and contribute to broader discussions about organizational design within intercollegiate athletics.

Please note: Underlined text indicates hyperlinks to supplemental materials for practitioners, prospective employees, and students. Additional references are included in the appendices.

05 The Pipeline Project Overview



Key Findings

OVERALL FBS

- Aggregated employment across FBS conferences fell by 2.46% from 2024 to 2025. Power 4 (P4) aggregated conference data indicated a 0.55% decrease in staffing, while Group of 5 (G5) indicated a 7.74% decline. The Big Ten was the only FBS conference to increase staff (3.65%).
- Marketing and Fan Engagement (-19.4%) and Student Athlete Services (-12.6%) experienced the greatest staffing declines from 2024 to 2025.
- Media (45.3%) and NIL (72.7%) saw the greatest increase from 2024 to 2025. Other departments such as Corporate Sales and Sponsorships (6.8%) and Ticket Sales (6.1%) also saw an increase in employment trends.
- Business Office operations have also grown (31.6%) as athletic departments have added more positions related to human resources, business analytics, and legal assistance.

Overall, these trends are not surprising given the recent macroeconomic changes across the intercollegiate athletics landscape with changes to NIL and the *House v. NCAA* settlement.

POWER 4

- Power 4 conferences are experiencing a lot of volatility across their respective athletic departments. NIL (64.4%), Media (42.7%), Corporate Sales and Sponsorships (13.5%), Ticket Sales (10.9%) and Sports Performance (8.9%) saw dramatic growth in staffing. These increases equate to hundreds of positions added across the conference to, primarily, focus on revenue generation or athlete performance.
- Departments experiencing the most significant decrease in staffing include Communications (-14.7%) and Marketing and Fan Engagement (-12.1%). It is possible that athletic departments have reorganized staff in these areas to be included in "Media" to allow for greater collaboration and resource sharing.
- Student Athlete Services (-10.9%) also declined. As athletic departments seek efficiency, this decline may indicate departments are utilizing existing student support staff (e.g., academic and career advisors, learning specialists) on campus to eliminate redundancies.

GROUP of 5

- The Group of 5 institutions experienced staffing growth in NIL (110.0%), media (58.4%) and fundraising (14.5%)
- There are a few surprising trends in departments experiencing a decline in staff. These include Marketing and Fan Engagement (-36.5%), Sports Performance (-17.5%), Student Athlete Services (-16.8%), Compliance (-10.2%), Corporate Sales and Sponsorships (-10.2%), and Ticket Sales (-7.6%)

Key Findings

GENDER REPRESENTATION

- Across intercollegiate athletics, it is clear there is a decline in staffing levels at both Power 4 and Group of 5 institutions. Men and women are experiencing staffing declines at similar rates overall.
- The Big Ten, which experienced growth in staffing, added a higher percentage of women (5.99%) than men (2.20%). In the Mountain West, the decline of male staff was negligible (0.43%) while the percentage of women in Mountain West athletic departments declined almost 10%.
- Similarly, the Sunbelt conference experienced a 10.05% decrease in male staff members and women's representation dropped over 14%.
- In the 2024 Employment Overview NCAA Football Bowl Subdivisions report, women represented more than 50% of entry-level employees in 3 Group of 5 conferences (Sunbelt, Mid-American, American Athletic); however, this year's report indicates that women do not represent more than 50% of any staffing tier in the Group of 5 or Power 4 conferences. While some of this might be attributed to recoding career tiers, women's representation across Group of 5 athletic conferences dropped almost 10%.
- Men occupy roughly 70% of senior and executive positions within revenue-generating departments. As a result, men disproportionately gain access to the high-leverage experiences and strategic skill sets widely viewed as prerequisites for becoming an athletic director.
- At the time of data collection, less than 10% of Athletic Directors were women. Nine women were identified as athletic directors compared to 12 at the time of data collection in 2024.

Career Stages Explained

In this study, the career stages of staff and administrators working in intercollegiate athletics were categorized as early/mid-career, middle management, senior management, and executive leadership. The **early/mid-career** tiers include professionals with relevant experience who consistently perform complex tasks and contribute to department operations; they may not supervise others but are trusted for their judgment, institutional knowledge, and reliability. **Middle managers** oversee specific teams, functions, or units and are responsible for translating strategic goals into operational plans.

Senior managers lead multiple units or major functional areas (e.g., student services, finance and capital projects, external affairs) and provide strategic input and oversee complex operations, often holding authority over budget, policy, and personnel decisions within their areas. Given there is only one Athletic Director for every institution and that there are often multiple administrators involved in the decision-making process for the athletic department, our research included the Athletic Director and variations of Associate Athletic Director (e.g., senior, deputy, executive) as positions in **executive leadership** in the department. Table 1 provides sample titles used to categorize positions. Table 2 identifies athletic department divisions.

Table 1
Staff and Athletic Administrator Career Stages

Career Stage	Sample Job Title
Early-Mid Career	Academic advisor, compliance coordinator, marketing assistant, event coordinator, graphic designer, account executive, assistant/associate director sports information
Middle Management	Assistant athletic director of compliance, director of marketing and promotions, head athletic trainer, senior associate director of events,
Senior Management	Associate athletic director, executive director of ticketing, general manager corporate sales & partnerships
Executive Leadership	Athletic director, senior/deputy athletic director, chief financial officer, chief operating officer

Table 2
Athletic Department Divisions

Athletic Administration	Marketing & Fan Engagement/ Creative Services
Building and Grounds	Media/Broadcasting
Business Office	Name, Image, & Likeness
Campus recreation	Sport Performance
Communications	Sports Medicine
Compliance	Student Athlete Services
Corporate Sales & Sponsorship	Ticket Sales/ Ticketing
Equipment Operations	
Event and Facility Operations	
Fundraising	

How to Use this Data

The Pipeline Project 2025 data can be used in several impactful ways by sport administrators, researchers, and students, depending on their roles and objectives.

1. College Athletic Administrators

- **Talent Retention and Development:** Universities and athletic departments can use this data to address high turnover rates by creating retention programs, professional development opportunities, and leadership pathways that encourage both entry- and mid-level staff to remain in the field.
- **Hiring and Promotion Policies:** Understanding where advancement bottlenecks occur (e.g., mid- to executive-level roles) enables administrators to refine hiring and promotion practices, strengthen internal pipelines, and support organizational effectiveness through a broad range of perspectives and experiences.
- **Benchmarking Against Peers:** Administrators may use comparative metrics from other departments within their conference or across NCAA Division I FBS to evaluate the talent pipeline health and leadership development trends. This can help identify gaps in advancement pathways or performance outcomes.

2. Sport Management Professionals

- **Strategic Career Planning:** Professionals in the sport industry can use the data to understand career progression trends, helping them identify potential challenges and opportunities at various career stages. This can guide their professional development and networking strategies.
- **Mentorship and Advocacy:** Senior professionals can identify gaps in advancement pathways and develop mentorship or professional development initiatives to support employees who may face barriers to career growth, enhancing retention and engagement across the department.
- **Sport Segmentation:** Sport management professionals in other segments of the industry (e.g., professional, interscholastic) can utilize the pipeline to examine their own pipeline.

3. Researchers and Educators

- **Building Research Agendas:** Scholars can use this data as a foundation for new research on gender diversity, career progression, and employment trends in sports management. This could include deeper investigations into the factors driving high turnover rates or barriers to advancement for women.
- **Identifying Research Gaps:** The report highlights areas where data on race, ethnicity, and non-binary identities are lacking, offering scholars the opportunity to expand future studies into these critical areas of diversity and inclusion.

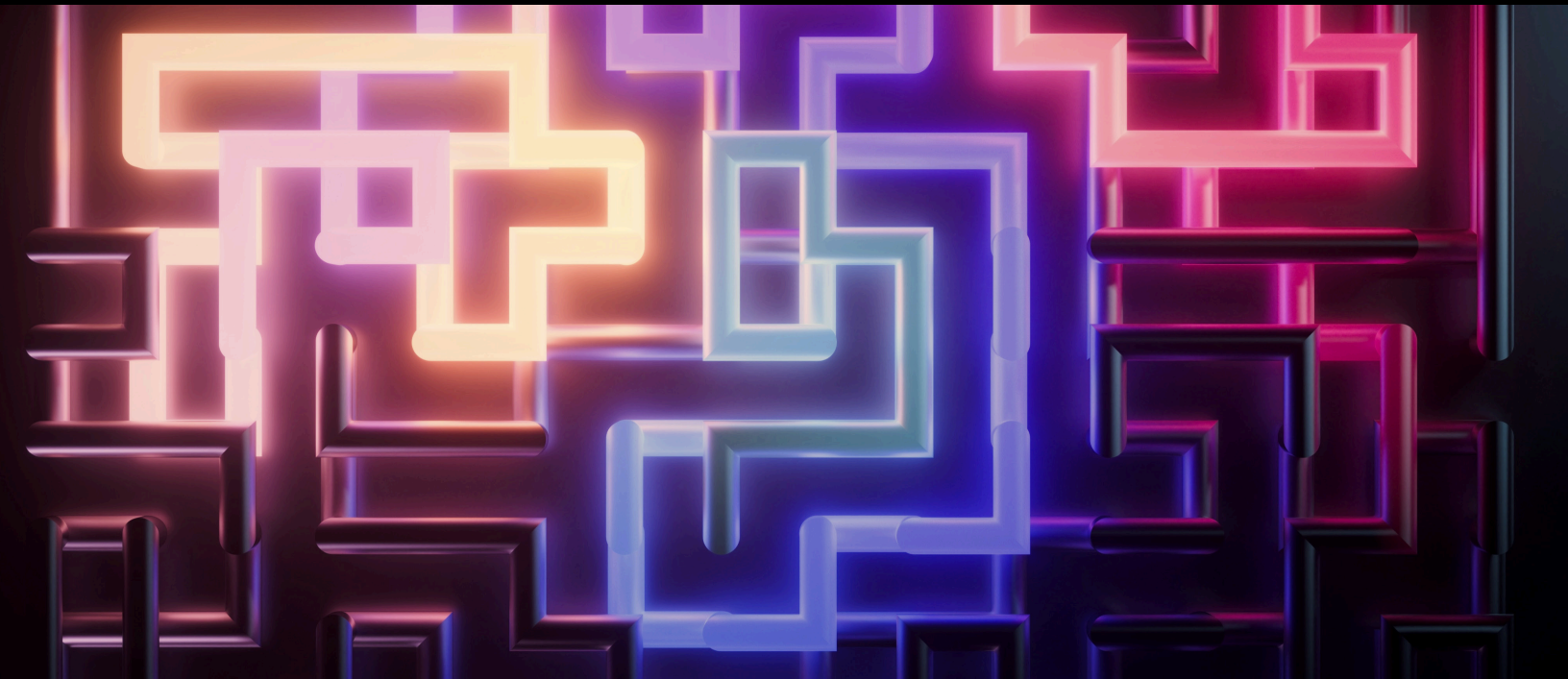
4. Policy Makers and Advocacy Groups

- **Talent Development Initiatives:** Organizations seeking to strengthen leadership pipelines in intercollegiate athletics can use this data to inform or enhance professional development and mentorship programs that support broader representation in decision-making roles.
- **Strategic Planning & Policy Development:** By leveraging the findings in this report, institutional and conference-level leaders can make data-informed decisions to refine hiring practices and implement standards that promote consistency, transparency, and fairness in leadership recruitment.

5. Prospective Employees in College Athletics

- **Career Navigation:** Aspiring professionals can use the data to better understand career pathways within intercollegiate athletics, helping identify departments or conferences with stronger advancement patterns and more consistent access to leadership opportunities.
- In summary, *The Pipeline Project* data should be used as a tool to strengthen leadership pathways and improve advancement practices within intercollegiate athletics, supporting meaningful, data-informed change at both the organizational and industry-wide levels.

¹⁰ FBS Aggregated Overview



FBS Aggregated Staffing Changes Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of of staffing changes in athletic departments across all FBS athletic departments.

AGGREGATED	Staffing				Revenue Median (2)		
	2024	2025	% Change		2023	2024	% Change
FBS Aggregated	18956	18490	-2.46%		\$ 81,517,254.00	\$ 96,693,461.00	18.62%
P4 Aggregated	13933	13856	-0.55%		\$ 145,757,262.00	\$ 153,535,955.00	5.34%
G5 Aggregated	5023	4634	-7.74%		\$ 41,215,879.00	\$ 43,807,365.00	6.29%

CONFERENCE	Staffing				Revenue Median		
	2024	2025	% Change		2023	2024	% Change
ACC	3533	3480	-1.50%		\$ 140,145,210.00	\$ 152,069,774.00	8.51%
Big Ten	4055	4203	3.65%		\$ 167,417,806.00	\$ 173,554,816.00	3.67%
Big 12	2708	2661	-1.74%		\$ 125,204,066.00	\$ 122,118,465.00	-2.46%
SEC	3637	3512	-3.44%		\$ 189,142,176.00	\$ 200,094,587.00	5.79%
American	1296	1168	-9.88%		\$ 76,595,515.00	\$ 61,845,747.00	-19.26%
CUSA	711	670	-5.77%		\$ 40,864,816.00	\$ 43,424,078.00	6.26%
MAC	834	783	-6.12%		\$ 32,568,933.00	\$ 36,897,818.00	13.29%
Sunbelt	1053	930	-11.68%		\$ 35,614,506.00	\$ 38,391,230.00	7.80%
MWC	1129	1083	-4.07%		\$ 51,789,705.00	\$ 56,065,439.00	8.26%

(2) Revenue median data from NCAA Membership Financial Database (2023) and Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database (2024).

FBS Department Staffing Overview

by Department Function

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of men and women employed in staff and administrative positions in athletic departments across all FBS NCAA member institutions.

Department	TOTAL	Men	Women	% Men	% Women
Athletic Administration	1878	1157	721	62%	38%
Buildings and Grounds	999	854	145	85%	15%
Business Office	1241	587	654	47%	53%
Campus Recreation	118	62	56	53%	47%
Communications	850	625	225	74%	26%
Compliance	474	238	236	50%	50%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	750	520	230	69%	31%
Equipment Operations	586	512	74	87%	13%
Event and Facility Operations	1417	1036	381	73%	27%
Fundraising	1163	614	549	53%	47%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	1115	702	413	63%	37%
Media	895	731	164	82%	18%
NIL	95	62	33	65%	35%
Sports Medicine	2476	1278	1198	52%	48%
Sports Performance	1871	1174	697	63%	37%
Student Athlete Services	1524	518	1006	34%	66%
Ticket Sales	1038	722	316	70%	30%
TOTAL	18490	11392	7098	62%	38%

FBS Staffing Trends by Department Function

Year-over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions across all FBS institutions. Columns with (-) indicate divisions that were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Departments	AGGREGATED GROWTH		Y-o-Y % Change
	2024	2025	
Athletic Administration	1875	1878	0.2%
Buildings and Grounds	2646	999	-
Business Office	943	1241	31.6%
Campus Recreation	122	118	-3.3%
Communications	941	850	-9.7%
Compliance	511	474	-7.2%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	702	750	6.8%
Equipment Operations	-	586	-
Event and Facility Operations	333	1417	-
Fundraising	1220	1163	-4.7%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	1383	1115	-19.4%
Media	616	895	45.3%
NIL	55	95	72.7%
Sports Medicine	2555	2476	-3.1%
Sports Performance	1850	1871	1.1%
Student Athlete Services	1743	1524	-12.6%
Ticket Sales	978	1038	6.1%
Technology Support	325	-	-
Concessions	58	-	-
Travel	100	-	-
	18956	18490	-2.5%

FBS Staffing Trends by Function & Gender Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions and gender across all FBS institutions. Three divisions -- Building & Grounds, Equipment Operations, and Event and Facility Operations -- were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Departments	Men	Y-o-Y Change_Men	Women	Y-o-Y Change_Women	Overall	Y-o-Y Change_Overall
Athletic Administration	1157	-0.3%	721	0.8%	1878	0.2%
Buildings and Grounds*	854	-	145	-	999	-
Business Office	587	64.9%	654	11.4%	1241	31.6%
Campus Recreation	62	6.9%	56	-12.5%	118	-3.3%
Communications	625	-9.3%	225	-10.7%	850	-9.7%
Compliance	238	-3.3%	236	-10.9%	474	-7.2%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	520	3.0%	230	16.8%	750	6.8%
Equipment Operations*	512	-	74	-	586	-
Event and Facility Operations*	1036	-	381	-	1417	-
Fundraising	614	-9.7%	549	1.7%	1163	-4.7%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	702	-21.2%	413	-16.1%	1115	-19.4%
Media	731	50.4%	164	26.2%	895	45.3%
NIL	62	121.4%	33	22.2%	95	72.7%
Sports Medicine	1278	-2.1%	1198	-4.2%	2476	-3.1%
Sports Performance	1174	-2.5%	697	7.9%	1871	1.1%
Student Athlete Services	518	-18.4%	1006	-9.2%	1524	-12.6%
Ticket Sales	722	4.3%	316	10.5%	1038	6.1%
	11392	-2.7%	7098	-2.1%	18490	-2.5%

FBS Conference Staffing Summary Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

5 Top Growth Areas

- 1) Name, Image, & Likeness (+73%)
- 2) Media & Broadcasting (+45%)
- 3) Business Operations (+32%)
- 4) Corporate Sales & Sponsorship (+7%)
- 5) Ticket Sales (+6%)

-2.5%

Overall Change in Athletic
Department Staffing*

+18.6%

Change in Median Athletic
Department Revenue

- 1) Marketing & Fan Engagement (-19.4%)
- 2) Student Athlete Services (-12.6%)
- 3) Communications (-9.7%)
- 4) Compliance (-7.2%)
- 5) Fundraising (-4.7%)

**Departments
in Decline**

32%

**Executive leadership
roles held by women**

*Does not include head coaches or coaching staffs

FBS Employee Career Stages

Total Staff & Administration

18,490

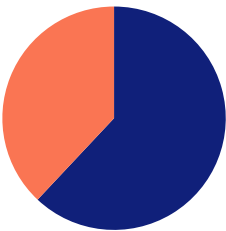
Representing all Power 4 and Group
of 5 Athletic Departments

Gender Diversity

7,098 11,392

Women

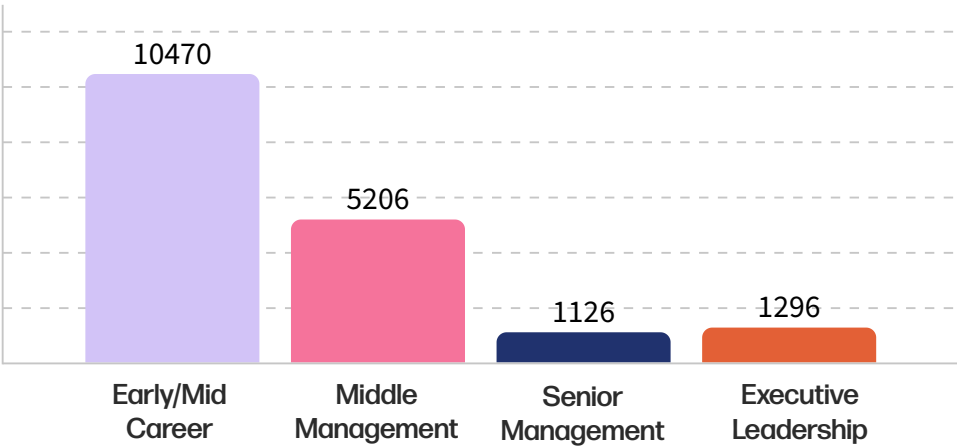
Men



Men (62) Women (38)

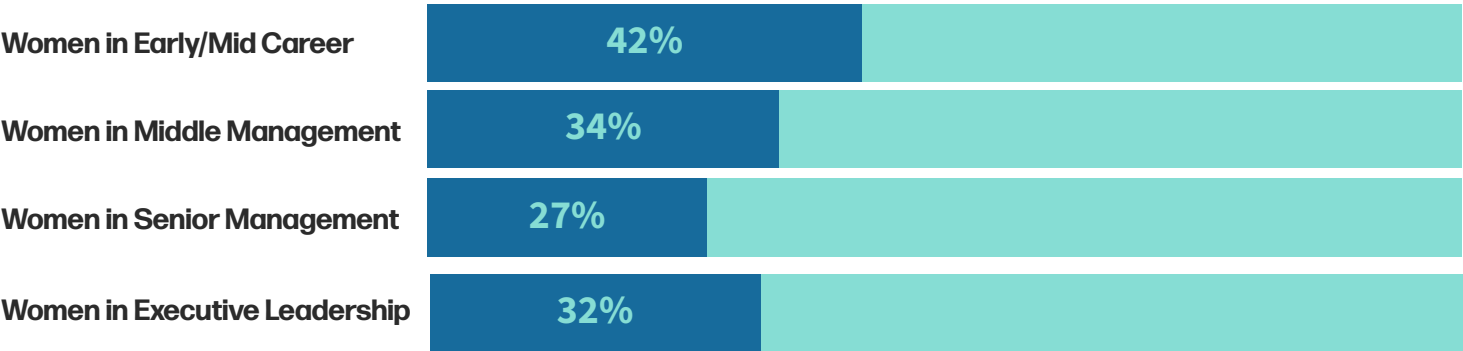
Career Stage

Number of employees in
entry/mid career, middle
management, senior and
executive management



Gender in Career Stage

Percentage of women in early/mid career, management, and executive leadership



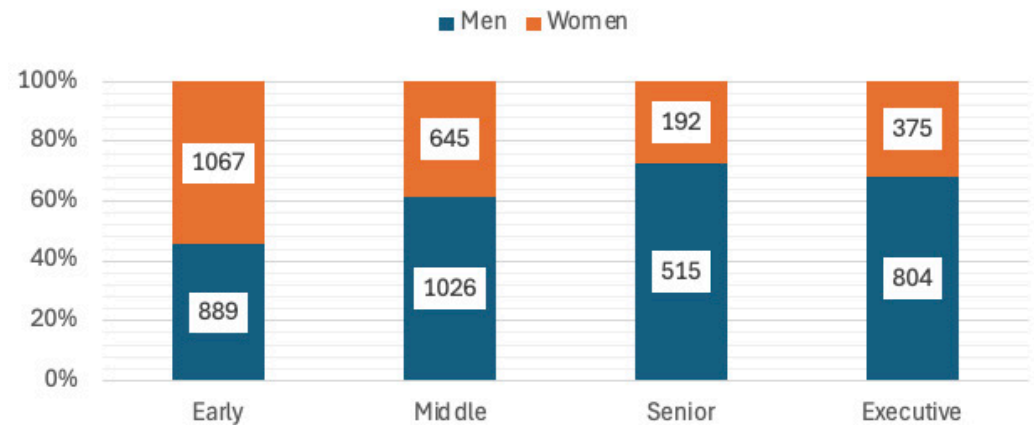
FBS Trends

Pipeline to Athletic Director

Research consistently shows the pathways most likely to reach the athletic director's chair run through revenue generation, capital projects, contract negotiation (such as apparel partnerships and media rights), and sport supervision. The accompanying chart brings these insights into focus by mapping men's and women's representation across revenue-generating units at different career stages, offering a clear view of how the pipeline develops.

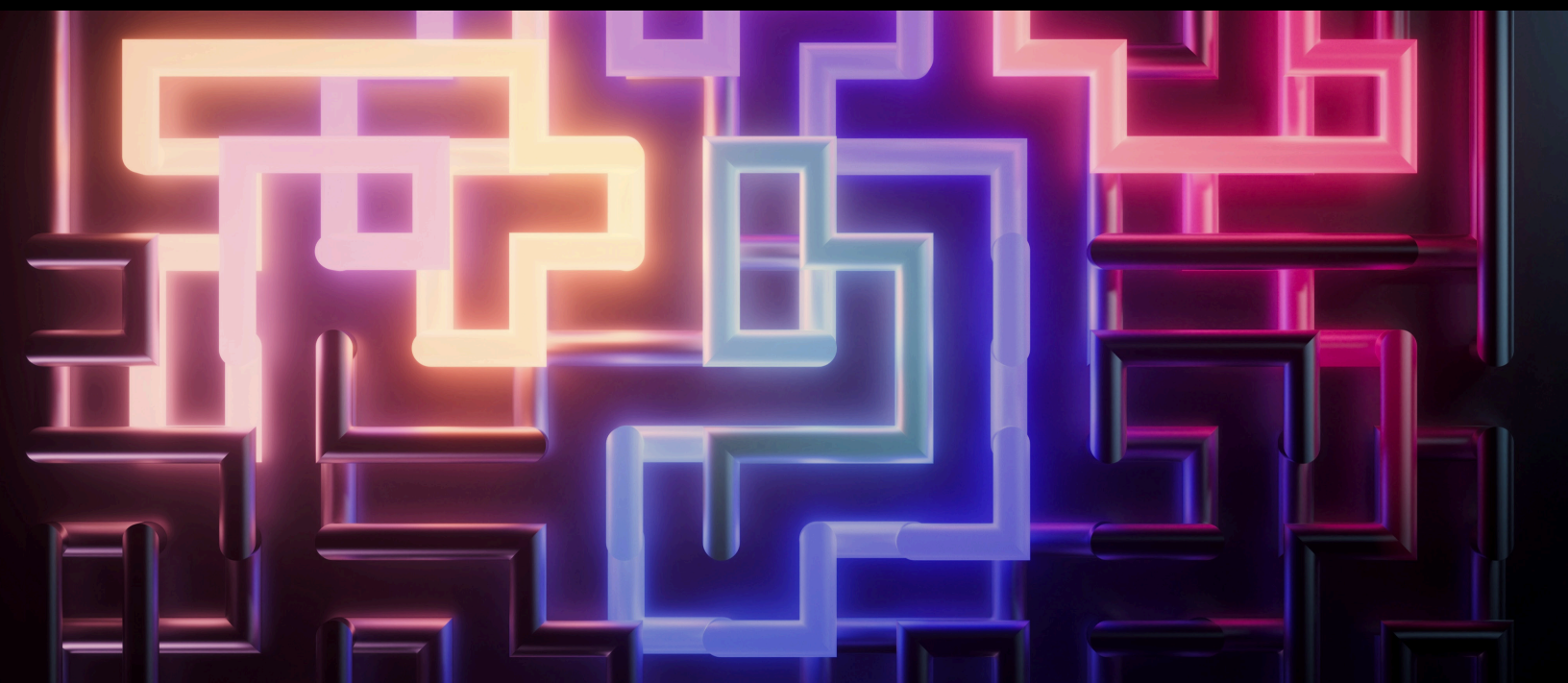
In the early stages of that pipeline, women appear in greater numbers in revenue-oriented departments such as fundraising, corporate sales and sponsorships, business and finance, and ticketing. Yet the balance shifts as responsibility and authority rise. Men increasingly dominate middle and senior management and hold a substantial majority of executive leadership posts. In fact, **men occupy roughly 70% of senior and executive positions within revenue-generating departments.** As a result, men disproportionately gain access to the high-leverage experiences and strategic skill sets widely viewed as prerequisites for becoming an athletic director.

Staffing by Career Tier in Revenue Generating Departments



18

Power 4 Aggregated Overview



Power 4 Staffing Overview

by Department Function

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of men and women employed in staff and administrative positions in athletic departments across all Power 4 institutions.

Department	TOTAL	Men	Women	% Men	% Women
Athletic Administration	1168	708	460	61%	39%
Buildings and Grounds	950	811	139	85%	15%
Business Office	1002	511	491	51%	49%
Campus Recreation	94	49	45	52%	48%
Communications	585	418	167	71%	29%
Compliance	351	173	178	49%	51%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	573	386	187	67%	33%
Equipment Operations	438	387	51	88%	12%
Event and Facility Operations	1122	808	314	72%	28%
Fundraising	903	455	448	50%	50%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	854	515	339	60%	40%
Media	735	586	149	80%	20%
NIL	74	49	25	66%	34%
Sports Medicine	1664	876	788	53%	47%
Sports Performance	1423	849	574	60%	40%
Student Athlete Services	1113	384	729	35%	65%
Ticket Sales	807	553	254	69%	31%
TOTAL	13856	8518	5338	61%	39%

Power 4 Staffing Trends by Department Function

Year-over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions across all Power 4 athletic departments. Columns with (-) indicate divisions that were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Department	2024	2025	% Change
Athletic Administration	1108	1168	5%
Buildings and Grounds	2161	950	-
Business Office*	671	1002	49%
Campus Recreation	109	94	-14%
Communications	686	585	-15%
Compliance	374	351	-6%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships*	505	573	13%
Equipment Operations	-	438	-
Event and Facility Operations	289	1122	-
Fundraising*	993	903	-9%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	972	854	-12%
Media	515	735	43%
NIL*	45	74	64%
Sports Medicine	1773	1664	-6%
Sports Performance	1307	1423	9%
Student Athlete Services	1249	1113	-11%
Ticket Sales*	728	807	11%
Technology Support	301	-	-
Ticket Sales	52	-	-
Travel	95	-	-
TOTAL	13933	13856	-0.55%

Power 4 Staffing Trends by Function & Gender Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions and gender across Power 4 institutions. Three divisions -- Building & Grounds, Equipment Operations, and Event and Facility Operations -- were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Departments	Men	Y-o-Y Change_Men	Women	Y-o-Y Change_Women	Overall	Y-o-Y Change_Overall
Athletic Administration	708	6.3%	460	4.1%	1168	5.4%
Buildings and Grounds*	811	-	139	-	950	-
Business Office	511	-	491	-	1002	-
Campus Recreation	49	-7.5%	45	-19.6%	94	-13.8%
Communications	418	-13.8%	167	-16.9%	585	-14.7%
Compliance	173	-4.4%	178	-7.8%	351	-6.1%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	386	6.0%	187	32.6%	573	13.5%
Equipment Operations*	387	-	51	-	438	-
Event and Facility Operations*	808	-	314	-	1122	-
Fundraising	455	-15.9%	448	-0.9%	903	-9.1%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	515	-16.0%	339	-5.6%	854	-12.1%
Media	586	45.4%	149	33.0%	735	42.7%
NIL	49	122.7%	25	8.7%	74	64.4%
Sports Medicine	876	-5.3%	788	-7.1%	1664	-6.1%
Sports Performance	849	2.3%	574	20.3%	1423	8.9%
Student Athlete Services	384	-14.7%	729	-8.8%	1113	-10.9%
Ticket Sales	553	7.2%	254	19.8%	807	10.9%
	8518	-1.3%	5338	0.64%	13856	-0.55%

Power 4 Staffing Summary

Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

5 Top Growth Areas

- 1) Name, Image, & Likeness (+64%)
- 2) Business Operations (+49%)
- 3) Media & Broadcasting (+42%)
- 4) Corporate Sales & Sponsorship (+14%)
- 5) Ticket Sales (+11%)

-0.5%

Overall Change in Athletic
Department Staffing*

+5.3%

Change in Median Athletic
Department Revenue

- 1) Communications (-15%)
- 2) Marketing & Fan Engagement (-12%)
- 3) Student Athlete Services (-11%)
- 4) Fundraising (-9%)
- 5) Compliance (-6%)

**Divisions in
Decline**

31%

**Executive leadership
roles held by women**

*Does not include head coaches or coaching staffs

Power 4 Employee Career Stages

Total Staff & Administration

13,856

Representing all Power 4 and Group
of 5 Athletic Departments

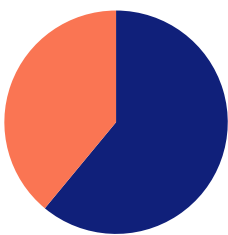
Gender Diversity

5,338

Women

8,518

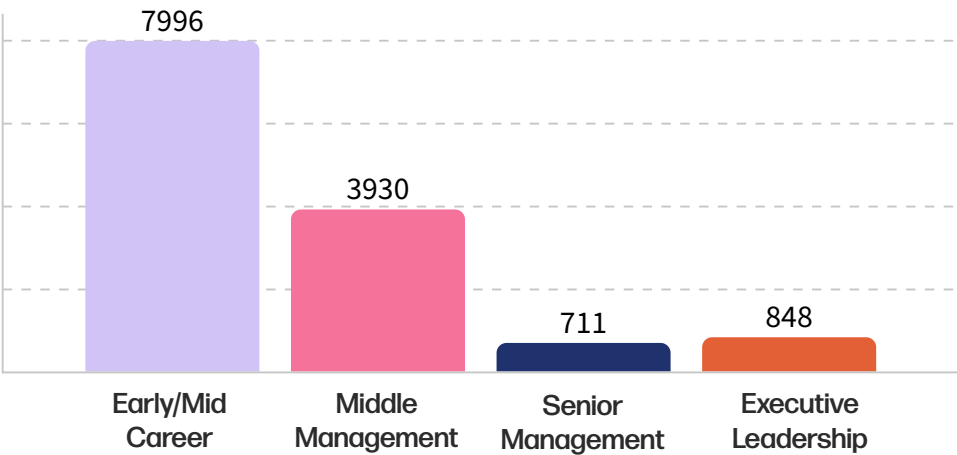
Men



Men (61) Women (39)

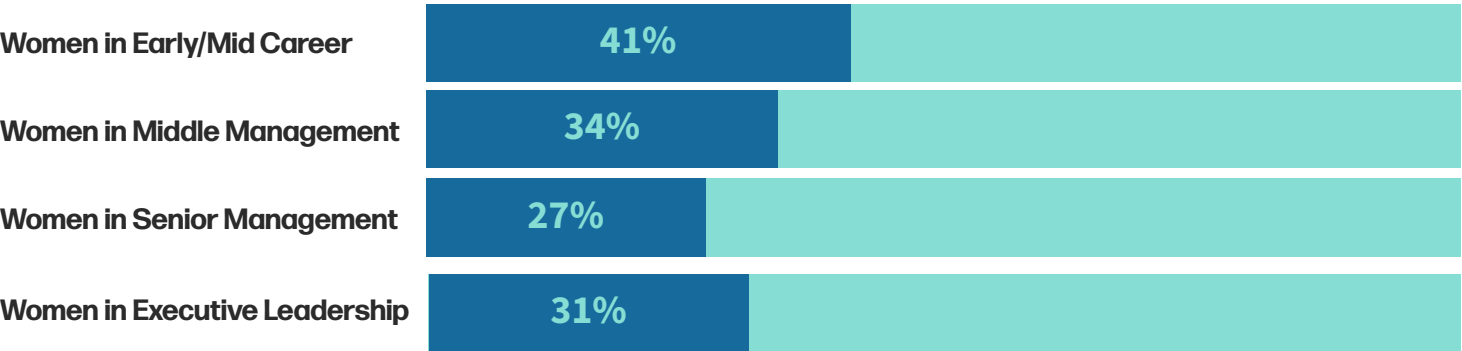
Career Stage

Number of employees in
entry/mid career, middle
management, senior and
executive management



Gender in Career Stage

Percentage of women in early/mid career, management, and executive leadership



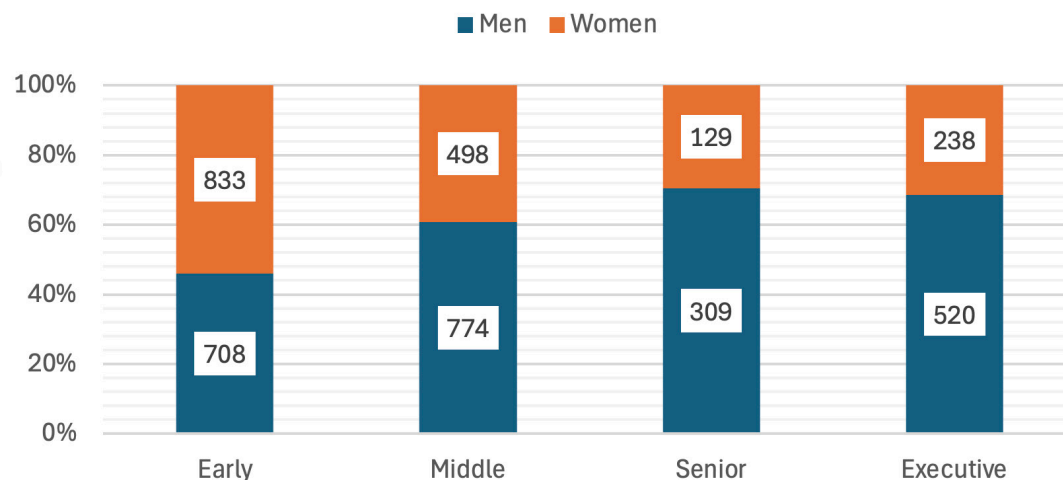
Power 4 Trends

Pipeline to Athletic Director

Research consistently shows the pathways most likely to reach the athletic director's chair run through revenue generation, capital projects, contract negotiation (such as apparel partnerships and media rights), and sport supervision. The accompanying chart brings these insights into focus by mapping men's and women's representation across revenue-generating units at different career stages, offering a clear view of how the pipeline develops.

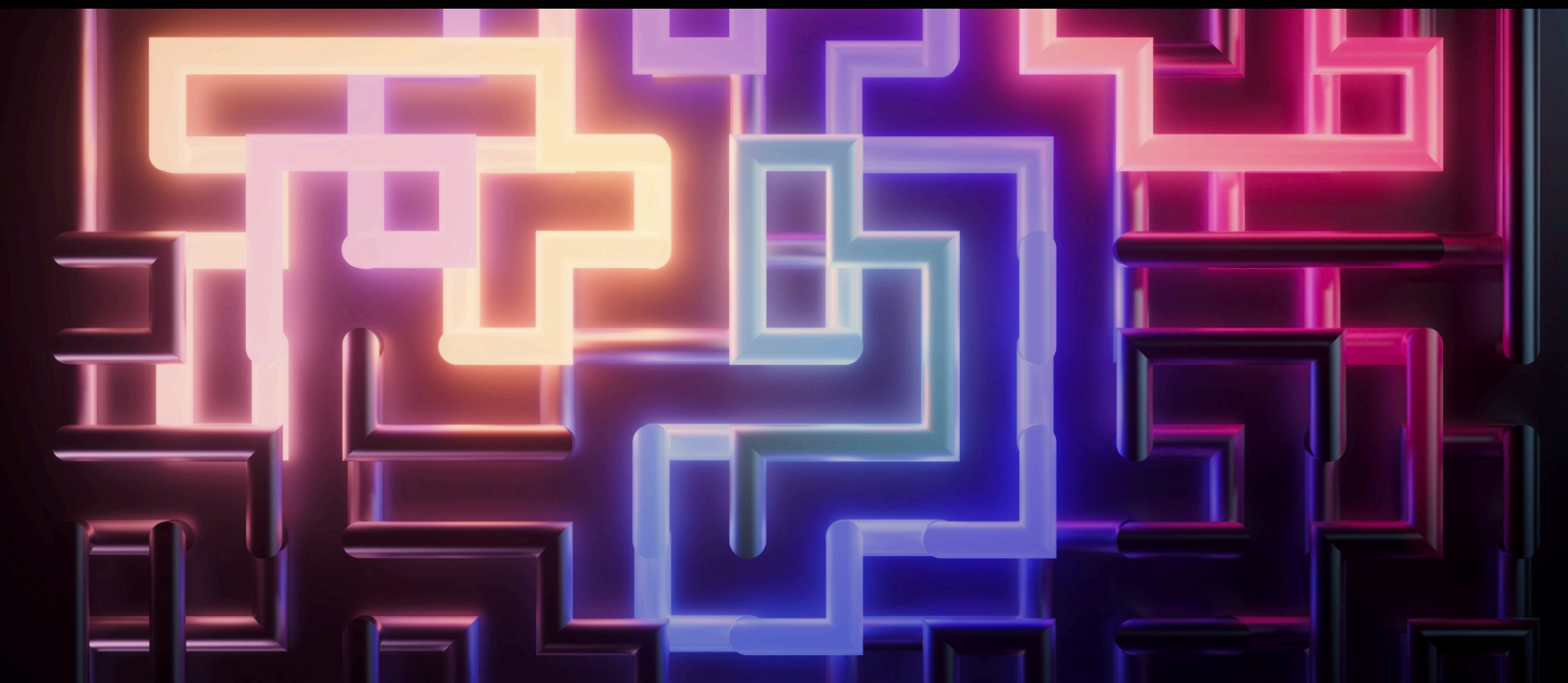
In the early stages of that pipeline, women appear in greater numbers in revenue-oriented departments such as fundraising, corporate sales and sponsorships, business and finance, and ticketing. Yet the balance shifts as responsibility and authority rise. Similar to the overall FBS trend, men increasingly dominate middle and senior management and hold a substantial majority of executive leadership posts. In fact, **men occupy roughly 70% of senior and executive positions within revenue-generating departments.** As a result, men disproportionately gain access to the high-leverage experiences and strategic skill sets widely viewed as prerequisites for becoming an athletic director.

Staffing by Career Tier in Revenue Generating Departments



²⁵ **Power 4 Conferences**

**ACC
Big Ten
Big 12
SEC**



Power 4 Staffing Trends by Conference

Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the year-over-year (y-o-y) change (%) of staff across athletic departments in Power 4 conferences. Columns with (-) indicate divisions that were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Department	ACC % Change	Big Ten % Change	Big 12 % Change	SEC % Change
Athletic Administration	-1%	13%	-2%	11%
Buildings and Grounds	-	-	-	-
Business Office*	34%	65%	23%	66.7%
Campus Recreation	-8%	-11%	-100%	0.0%
Communications	-8%	-11%	-26%	-15.2%
Compliance	-8%	-7%	1.2%	-10.0%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships*	-3%	22%	-28%	26.1%
Equipment Operations	-	-	-	-
Event and Facility Operations	-	-	-	-
Fundraising*	-6%	-10%	-6%	-15%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	2%	-3%	-19%	-25%
Media	34%	50%	82%	28%
NIL*	200%	9%	50%	122%
Sports Medicine	-3%	-4%	6%	-23%
Sports Performance	-3%	16%	5%	16%
Student Athlete Services	-9%	-29%	-13%	-21%
Ticket Sales*	10%	28%	4%	-2%
TOTAL	-1.50%	3.65%	-1.74%	-3.44%

ACC Aggregated Conference Data

18
**Colleges &
Universities**

Boston College
U. California
Clemson
Duke*
Florida State
Georgia Tech
Louisville
Miami
NC State

North Carolina
Notre Dame
Pittsburgh
Southern Methodist
Stanford
Syracuse
Virginia*
Virginia Tech
Wake Forest

\$152,069,774

Median Athletic Department Revenue (1)

Range \$139,458,796 (Virginia Tech) to \$193,923,108 (Clemson)

#41

**Median Conference
Learfield Ranking**

Range #3 (Stanford) to
#74 (Pittsburgh)

3,480

**Total Athletic
Department Staff &
Administration**

Does not include head coaches or
coaching staffs

2

**Women Athletic
Directors***

Atlantic Coast Conference Department Overview

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of men and women employed in staff and administrative positions in athletic departments in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

	Total Male Employees	Total Female Employees	% Male	% Female
Athletic Administration	188	117	62%	38%
Buildings and Grounds	106	11	91%	9%
Business Office	107	113	49%	51%
Campus Recreation	41	37	53%	47%
Communications	109	52	68%	32%
Compliance	43	37	54%	46%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	96	33	74%	26%
Equipment Operations	107	11	91%	9%
Event and Facility Operations	208	66	76%	24%
Fundraising	151	146	51%	49%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	136	90	60%	40%
Media	150	43	78%	22%
NIL	10	8	56%	44%
Sports Medicine	230	215	52%	48%
Sports Performance	207	137	60%	40%
Student Athlete Services	90	169	35%	65%
Ticket Sales	160	56	74%	26%
Total Employees	2139	1341	61%	39%

ACC Staffing Trends by Function & Gender

Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions and gender across ACC institutions. Three divisions -- Building & Grounds, Equipment Operations, and Event and Facility Operations -- were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Department	Men		% Change	Women		% Change
	2024	2025		2024	2025	
Athletic Administration	186	188	1.1%	123	117	-4.9%
Buildings and Grounds	389	106	-	79	11	-
Business Office	58	107	84.5%	106	113	6.6%
Campus Recreation	41	41	0.0%	44	37	-15.9%
Communications	123	109	-11.4%	52	52	0.0%
Compliance	50	43	-14.0%	37	37	0.0%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	100	96	-4.0%	33	33	0.0%
Equipment Operations	-	107	-	-	11	-
Event and Facility Operations	34	208	-	18	66	-
Fundraising	173	151	-12.7%	142	146	2.8%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	136	136	0.0%	86	90	4.7%
Media	113	150	32.7%	31	43	38.7%
NIL	2	10	400.0%	4	8	100.0%
Sports Medicine	235	230	-2.1%	222	215	-3.2%
Sports Performance	221	207	-6.3%	132	137	3.8%
Student Athlete Services	101	90	-10.9%	183	169	-7.7%
Ticket Sales	144	160	11.1%	52	56	7.7%
Technology	61	-	-	13	-	-
Travel	3	-	-	3	-	-
Concessions	1	-	-	0	-	-
TOTAL	2171	2139	1.5%	1360	1341	-1.4%

ACC Employee Career Stages

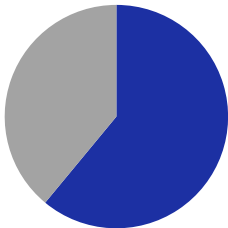
Total Staff & Administration
3,480

Representing all Athletic Departments in the Conference



Gender Diversity

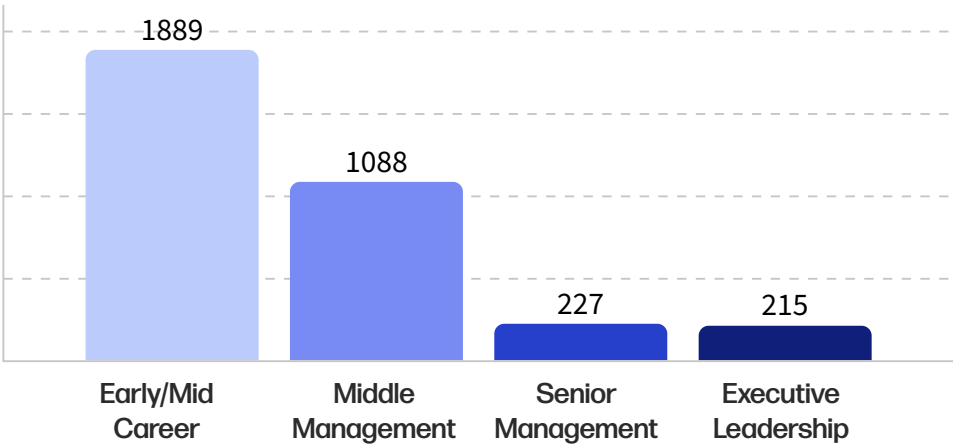
1,341 **2,139**
Women Men



Men (61) Women (39)

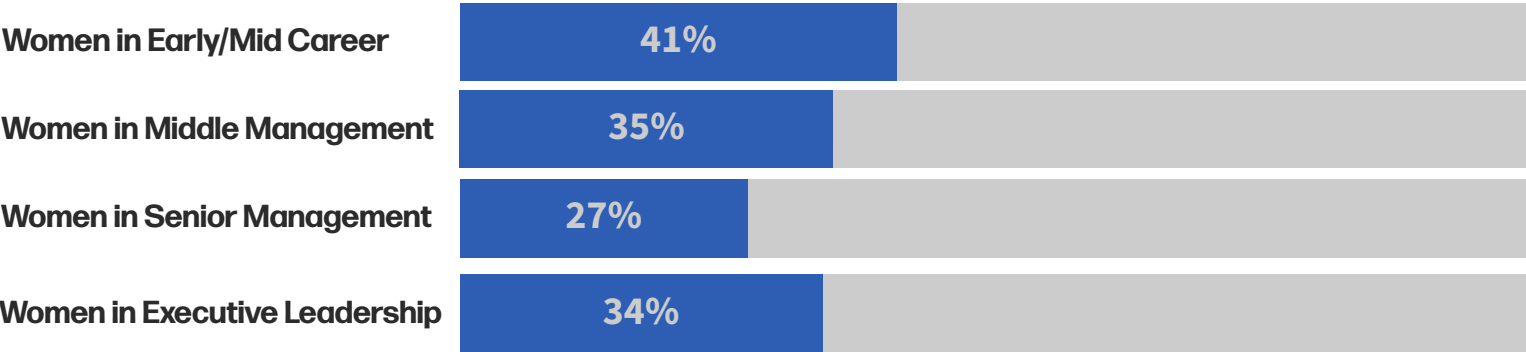
Career Stage

Number of employees in entry/mid career, middle management, senior and executive management



Gender in Career Stage

Percentage of women in early/mid career, management, and executive leadership



Big Ten Aggregated Conference Data

18

**Colleges &
Universities**

Illinois
Indiana
Iowa*
Maryland
Michigan
Michigan State
Minnesota
Nebraska
Northwestern

Ohio State
Oregon
Penn State
Purdue
Rutgers
UCLA
USC*
Washington
Wisconsin

\$173,554,816

Median Athletic Department Revenue (1)

Range \$119,045,826 (U. of Maryland) to \$254,933,664 (Ohio State)

#32

**Median Conference
Learfield Ranking**

Range #2 (USC) to
#80 (Rutgers)

4,203

**Total Athletic
Department Staff &
Administration**

Does not include head coaches or
coaching staffs

2

**Women Athletic
Directors***

Big Ten Conference Department Overview

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of men and women employed in staff and administrative positions in athletic departments in the Big Ten Conference.

	Total Male Employees	Total Female Employees	% Male	% Female
Athletic Administration	172	139	55%	45%
Buildings and Grounds	307	54	85%	15%
Business Office	167	122	58%	42%
Campus Recreation	8	8	50%	50%
Communications	120	51	70%	30%
Compliance	55	52	51%	49%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	130	77	63%	37%
Equipment Operations	101	24	81%	19%
Event and Facility Operations	282	124	69%	31%
Fundraising	114	121	49%	51%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	133	97	58%	42%
Media	120	33	78%	22%
NIL	19	5	79%	21%
Sports Medicine	288	245	54%	46%
Sports Performance	241	169	59%	41%
Student Athlete Services	133	228	37%	63%
Ticket Sales	168	96	64%	36%
Total Employees	2558	1645	61%	39%

Big Ten Staffing Trends by Function & Gender Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

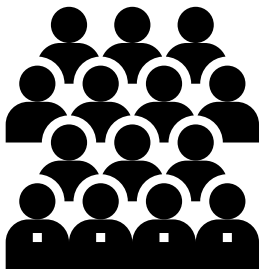
This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions and gender across Big Ten institutions. Three divisions -- Building & Grounds, Equipment Operations, and Event and Facility Operations -- were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Department	Men			Women		
	2024	2025	% Change	2024	2025	% Change
Athletic Administration	158	172	8.9%	117	139	18.8%
Buildings and Grounds	584	307	-	125	54	-
Business Office	65	167	156.9%	110	122	10.9%
Campus Recreation	10	8	-20.0%	8	8	0.0%
Communications	134	120	-10.4%	58	51	-12.1%
Compliance	53	55	3.8%	62	52	-16.1%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	120	130	8.3%	49	77	57.1%
Equipment Operations	-	101	-	-	24	-
Event & Facility Operations	64	282	-	42	124	-
Fundraising	139	114	-18.0%	123	121	-1.6%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	151	133	-11.9%	86	97	12.8%
Media	78	120	53.8%	24	33	37.5%
NIL	10	19	90.0%	12	5	-58.3%
Sports Medicine	299	288	-3.7%	142	245	72.5%
Sports Performance	210	241	14.8%	254	169	-33.5%
Student Athlete Services	141	133	-5.7%	223	228	2.2%
Ticket Sales	135	168	24.4%	72	96	33.3%
Technology	106	-	-	9	-	-
Travel	2	-	-	11	-	-
Concessions	44	-	-	25	-	-
TOTAL	2503	2558	2.2%	1552	1645	6.0%

Big Ten Employee Career Stages

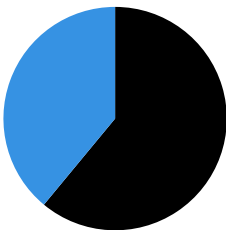
Total Staff &
Administration
4,203

Representing all Athletic Departments
in the Conference



Gender Diversity

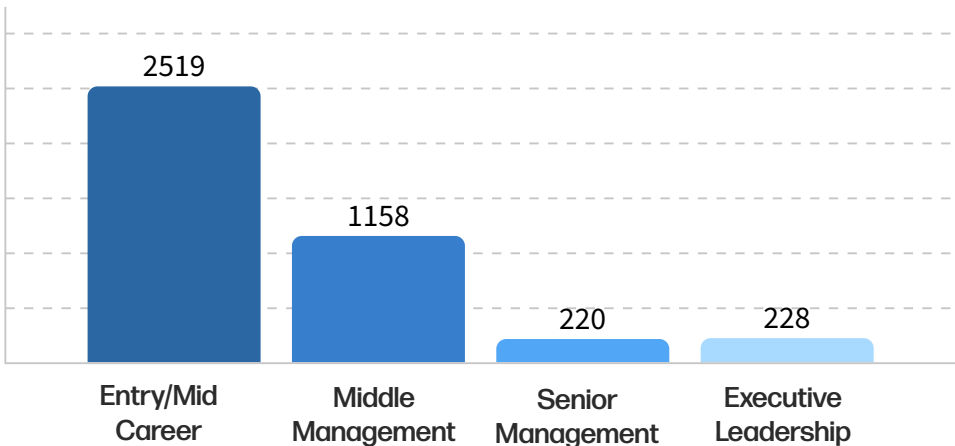
1,645 **2,558**
Women Men



Men (61) Women (39)

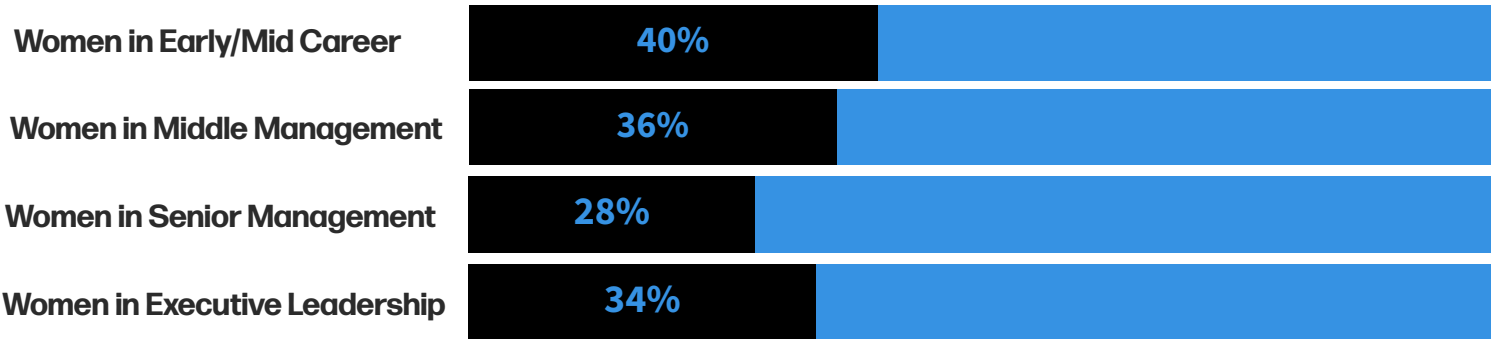
Career Stage

Number of employees in
entry/mid career, middle
management, senior and
executive management



Gender in Career Stage

Percentage of women in early/mid career, management, and executive leadership



Big 12 Aggregated Conference Data

16

Colleges & Universities

Arizona*
Arizona State
Baylor
BYU
Cincinnati
Colorado
Houston
Iowa State

Kansas
Kansas State
Oklahoma State
TCU
Texas Tech
UCF
Utah
West Virginia

\$122,118,465

Median Athletic Department Revenue(1)

Range \$88,229,817 (Houston) to \$146,567,503 (Univ. of Colorado, Boulder)

#54

**Median Conference
Learfield Ranking**

Range #25 (BYU)

#125 (Cincinnati)

2,661

**Total Athletic Department
Staff & Administration**

Does not include head coaches or
coaching staffs

1

**Women Athletic
Directors**

Big 12 Conference Department Overview

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of men and women employed in staff and administrative positions in athletic departments in the Big 12 Conference.

	Total Male Employees	Total Female Employees	% Male	% Female
Athletic Administration	145	83	64%	36%
Buildings and Grounds	114	26	81%	19%
Business Office	68	100	40%	60%
Campus Recreation	0	0	0%	0%
Communications	89	25	78%	22%
Compliance	41	42	49%	51%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	81	40	67%	33%
Equipment Operations	77	10	89%	11%
Event and Facility Operations	147	51	74%	26%
Fundraising	92	79	54%	46%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	99	71	58%	42%
Media	115	36	76%	24%
NIL	7	5	58%	42%
Sports Medicine	198	170	54%	46%
Sports Performance	172	116	60%	40%
Student Athlete Services	81	130	38%	62%
Ticket Sales	106	45	70%	30%
Total Employees	1632	1029	61%	39%

Big 12 Staffing Trends by Function & Gender Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions and gender across Big 12 institutions. Three divisions -- Building & Grounds, Equipment Operations, and Event and Facility Operations -- were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

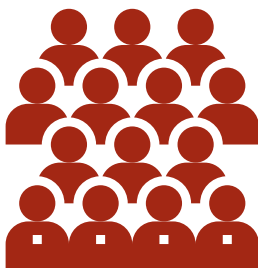
Department	Men			Women		
	2024	2025	% Change	2024	2025	% Change
Athletic Administration	146	145	-0.7%	86	83	-3.5%
Buildings and Grounds	319	114	-	85	26	-
Business Office	53	68	28.3%	84	100	19.0%
Campus Recreation	2	0	-100.0%	4	0	-100.0%
Communications	112	89	-20.5%	43	25	-41.9%
Compliance	40	41	2.5%	42	42	0.0%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	78	81	3.8%	33	40	21.2%
Equipment Operations	-	77	-	-	10	-
Event & Facility Operations	28	147	-	10	51	-
Fundraising	109	92	-15.6%	72	79	9.7%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	119	99	-16.8%	92	71	-22.8%
Media	66	115	74.2%	17	36	111.8%
NIL	5	7	40.0%	3	5	66.7%
Sports Medicine	184	198	7.6%	163	170	4.3%
Sports Performance	180	172	-4.4%	94	116	23.4%
Student Athlete Services	83	81	-2.4%	159	130	-18.2%
Ticket Sales	109	106	-2.8%	36	45	25.0%
Technology	25	-	-	4	-	-
Travel	1	-	-	10	-	-
Concessions	8	-	-	4	-	-
TOTAL	1667	1632	-2.1%	1041	1029	-1.2%

Big 12 Employee Career Stages

Total Staff & Administration

2,661

Representing all Athletic Departments
in the Conference



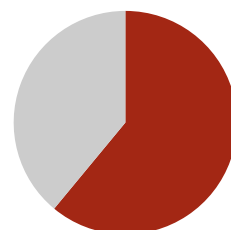
Gender Diversity

1,029

Women

1,632

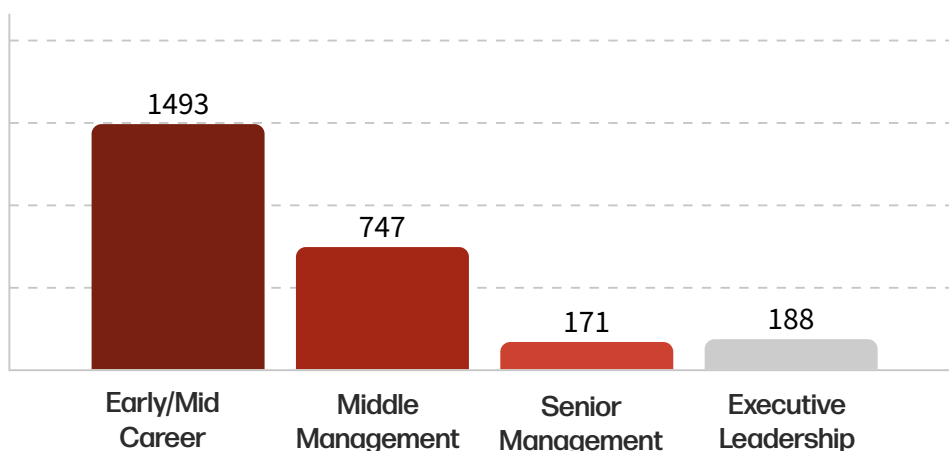
Men



■ Men (61) ■ Women (39)

Career Stage

Number of employees in
entry/mid career, middle
management, senior and
executive management



Gender in Career Stage

Percentage of women in early/mid career, management, and executive leadership

Women in Early/Mid Career

42%

Women in Middle Management

33%

Women in Senior Management

26%

Women in Executive Leadership

27%

SEC Aggregated Conference Data

16

**Colleges &
Universities**

Alabama
Arkansas
Auburn
Florida
Georgia
Kentucky
LSU
Mississippi State

Missouri
Oklahoma
Ole Miss
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Texas A&M
Vanderbilt*

\$200,094,587

Median Athletic Department Revenue (1)

Range \$127,241,981 (Mississippi State) to Texas (\$331,905,866)

#18

**Median Conference
Learfield Ranking**

Range #1 (Texas) to
#58(Vanderbilt)

3,512

**Total Athletic Department
Staff & Administration**

Does not include head coaches or
coaching staffs

1

**Women Athletic
Directors***

SEC Department Overview

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of men and women employed in staff and administrative positions in athletic departments in the Southeastern Conference.

	Total Male Employees	Total Female Employees	% Male	% Female
Athletic Administration	203	121	63%	37%
Buildings and Grounds	284	48	86%	14%
Business Office	169	156	52%	48%
Campus Recreation	0	0	0%	0%
Communications	100	39	72%	28%
Compliance	34	47	42%	58%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	79	37	68%	32%
Equipment Operations	102	6	94%	6%
Event and Facility Operations	171	73	70%	30%
Fundraising	98	102	49%	51%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	147	81	64%	36%
Media	201	37	84%	16%
NIL	13	7	65%	35%
Sports Medicine	160	158	50%	50%
Sports Performance	229	152	60%	40%
Student Athlete Services	80	202	28%	72%
Ticket Sales	119	57	68%	32%
Total Employees	2189	1323	62%	38%

SEC Staffing Trends by Function & Gender Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions and gender across SEC institutions. Three divisions -- Building & Grounds, Equipment Operations, and Event and Facility Operations -- were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Department	Men			Women		
	2024	2025	% Change	2024	2025	% Change
Athletic Administration	176	203	15.3%	116	121	4.3%
Buildings and Grounds	499	284	-	81	48	-
Business Office	82	169	106.1%	113	156	38.1%
Campus Recreation	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%
Communications	116	100	-13.8%	48	39	-18.8%
Compliance	38	34	-10.5%	52	47	-9.6%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	66	79	19.7%	26	37	42.3%
Equipment Operations	-	102	-	-	6	-
Event & Facility Operations	55	171	-	38	73	-
Fundraising	120	98	-18.3%	115	102	-11.3%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	207	147	-29.0%	95	81	-14.7%
Media	146	201	37.7%	40	37	-7.5%
NIL	5	13	160.0%	4	7	75.0%
Sports Medicine	205	160	-22.0%	209	158	-24.4%
Sports Performance	219	229	4.6%	109	152	39.4%
Student Athlete Services	125	80	-36.0%	234	202	-13.7%
Ticket Sales	128	119	-7.0%	52	57	9.6%
Technology	76	-	-	7	-	-
Travel	13	-	-	9	-	-
Concessions	10	-	-	3	-	-
TOTAL	2286	2189	-4.2%	1351	1323	-2.1%

SEC

Employee Career Stages

Total Staff & Administration

3,512

Representing all Athletic Departments in the Conference



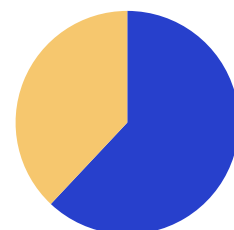
Gender Diversity

1,323

Women

2,189

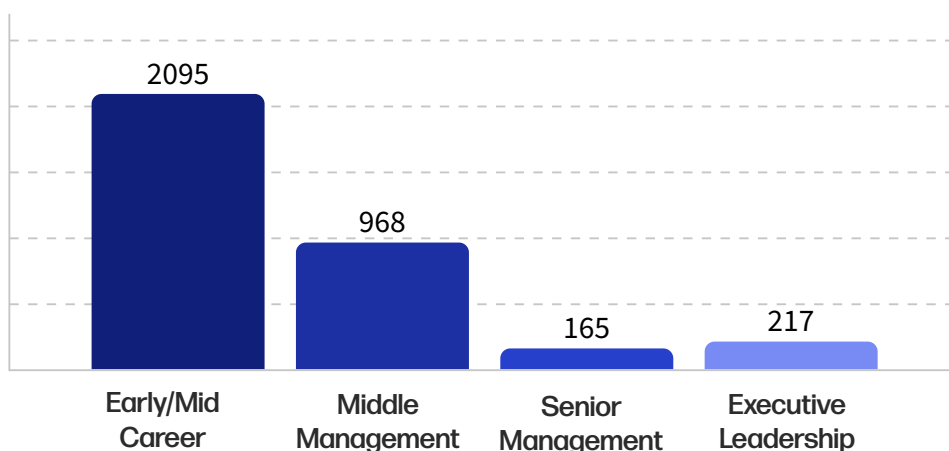
Men



■ Men (62) ■ Women (38)

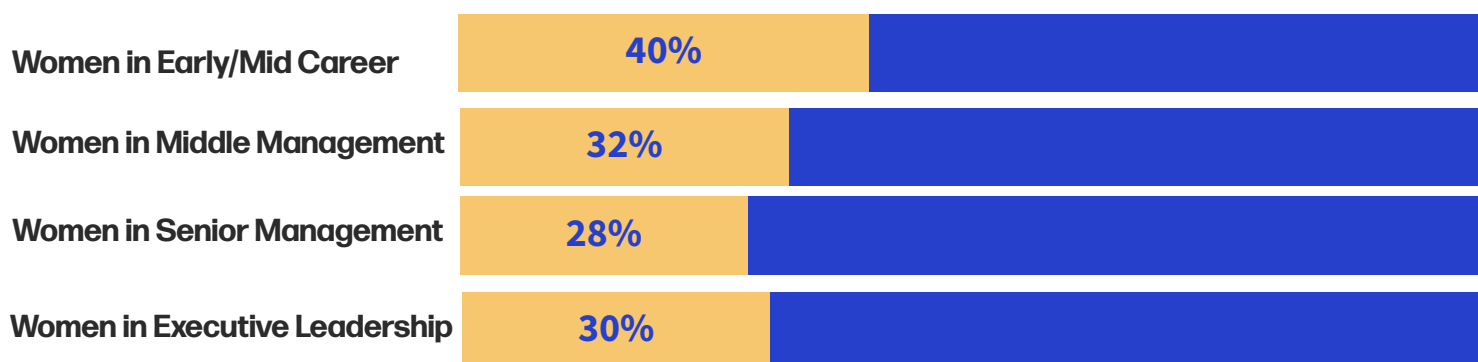
Career Stage

Number of employees in entry/mid career, middle management, senior and executive management



Gender in Career Stage

Percentage of women in early/mid career, management, and executive leadership



43 Group of 5 Aggregated Overview



Group of 5 Staffing Overview

by Department Function

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of men and women employed in staff and administrative positions in athletic departments across all Power 4 institutions.

Department	Total	Men	Women	% Men	% Women
Athletic Administration	710	449	261	63%	37%
Buildings and Grounds	49	43	6	88%	12%
Business Office	239	76	163	32%	68%
Campus Recreation	24	13	11	54%	46%
Communications	265	207	58	78%	22%
Compliance	123	65	58	53%	47%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	177	134	43	76%	24%
Equipment Operations	148	125	23	84%	16%
Event and Facility Operations	295	228	67	77%	23%
Fundraising	260	159	101	61%	39%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	261	187	74	72%	28%
Media	160	145	15	91%	9%
NIL	21	13	8	62%	38%
Sports Medicine	812	402	410	50%	50%
Sports Performance	448	325	123	73%	27%
Student Athlete Services	411	134	277	33%	67%
Ticket Sales	231	169	62	73%	27%
TOTAL	4634	2874	1760	62%	38%

Group of 5 Staffing Trends by Department Function Year-over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions across all Power 4 athletic departments. Columns with (-) indicate divisions that were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

G5 OVERALL CHANGE Y-o-Y	2024	2025	% Change
Athletic Administration	767	710	-7%
Buildings and Grounds	485	49	-
Business Office	272	239	-12%
Campus Recreation	13	24	85%
Communications	255	265	4%
Compliance	137	123	-10%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	197	177	-10%
Equipment Operations	-	148	-
Event and Facility Operations	44	295	-
Fundraising	227	260	15%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	411	261	-36%
Media	101	160	58%
NIL	10	21	110%
Sports Medicine	782	812	4%
Sports Performance	543	448	-17%
Student Athlete Services	494	411	-17%
Ticket Sales	250	231	-8%
Technology Support	24	-	-
Concessions	6	-	-
Travel	5	-	-
	5023	4634	-7.74%

Group of 5 Staffing Trends by Function & Gender Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions across all FBS institutions. Three divisions -- Building & Grounds, Equipment Operations, and Event and Facility Operations -- were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Departments	Men	Y-o-Y Change_Men	Women	Y-o-Y Change_Women	Overall	Y-o-Y Change_Overall
Athletic Administration	449	-9%	261	-4%	710	-7%
Buildings and Grounds*	43	-	6	-	49	-
Business Office	76	-	163	-	239	-
Campus Recreation	13	160%	11	38%	24	85%
Communications	207	1%	58	14%	265	4%
Compliance	65	0%	58	-19%	123	-10%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	134	-5%	43	-23%	177	-10%
Equipment Operations*	125	-	23	-	148	-
Event and Facility Operations*	228	-	67	-	295	-
Fundraising	159	14%	101	1%	260	15%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	187	-33%	74	-44%	261	-36%
Media	145	75%	15	-17%	160	58%
NIL	13	117%	8	100%	21	110%
Sports Medicine	402	6%	410	2%	812	4%
Sports Performance	325	-13%	123	-27%	448	-17%
Student Athlete Services	134	-28%	277	-10%	411	-17%
Ticket Sales	169	-4%	62	-16%	231	-8%
TOTAL	2874	-6.7%	1760	-9.5%	4634	-7.7%

Group of 5 Staffing Summary Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

5 Top Growth Areas

- 1) Name, Image, & Likeness (+110%)
- 2) Media & Broadcasting (+58%)
- 3) Fundraising (+15%)
- 4) Communications (+4%)
- 5) Sports Medicine (+4%)

-7.7%

Overall Change in Athletic
Department Staffing*

+6.3%

Change in Median Athletic
Department Revenue

- 1) Marketing & Fan Engagement (-37%)
- 2) Sports Performance (-18%)
- 3) Student Athlete Services (-17%)
- 4) Compliance (-10%)
- 5) Corporate Sales & Sponsorship (-10%)

**Divisions in
Decline**

33%

**Executive leadership
roles held by women**

Group of 5 Employee Career Stages

Total Staff & Administration

4,634

Representing all Power 4 and Group
of 5 Athletic Departments

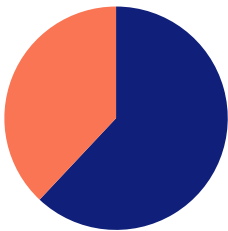
Gender Diversity

1,740

Women

2,894

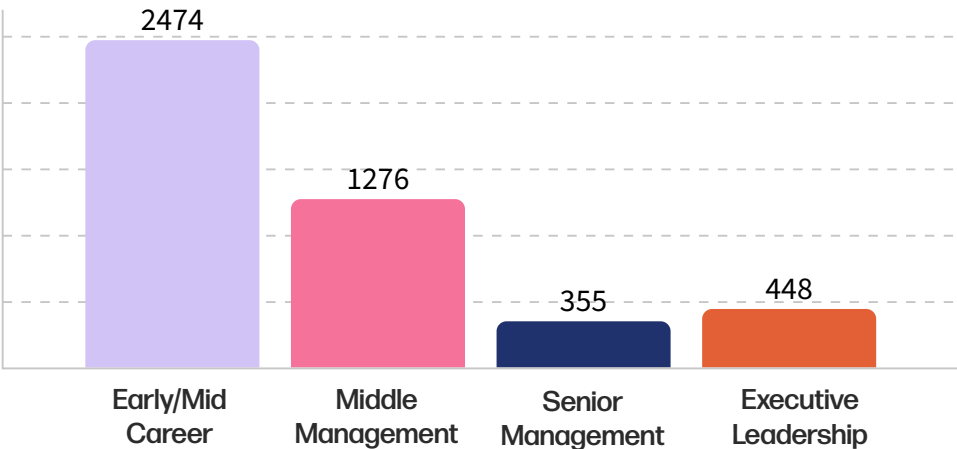
Men



Men (62) Women (38)

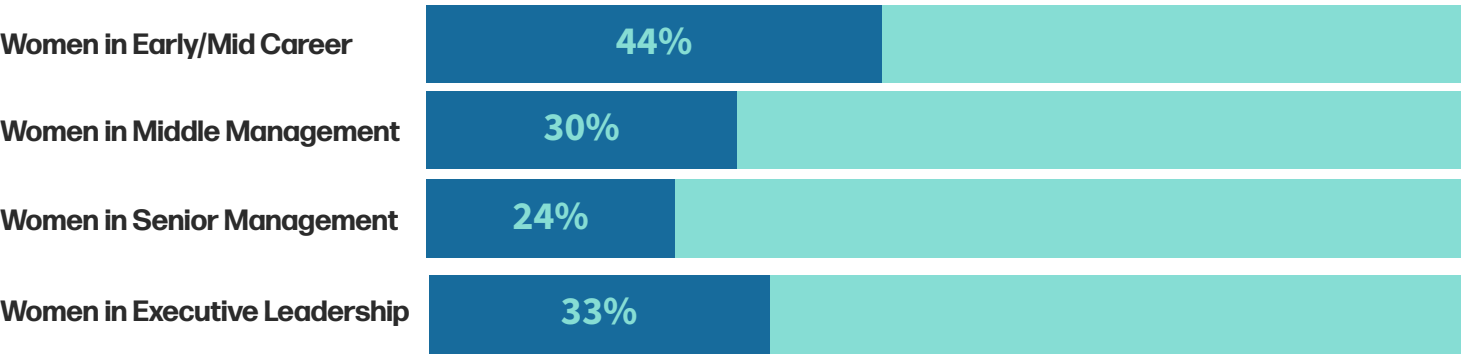
Career Stage

Number of employees in
entry/mid career, middle
management, senior and
executive management



Gender in Career Stage

Percentage of women in early/mid career, management, and executive leadership

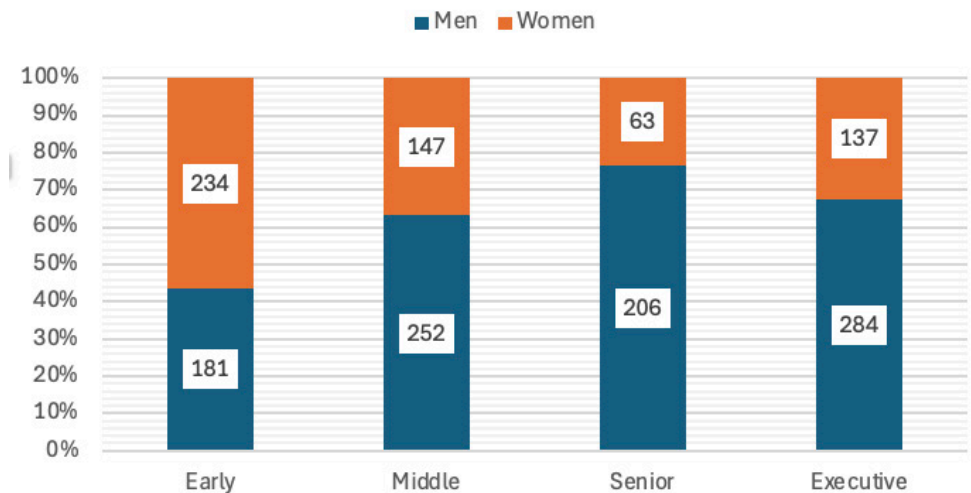


Group of 5 Trends Pipeline to Athletic Director

Research consistently shows the pathways most likely to reach the athletic director's chair run through revenue generation, capital projects, contract negotiation (such as apparel partnerships and media rights), and sport supervision. The accompanying chart brings these insights into focus by mapping men's and women's representation across revenue-generating units at different career stages, offering a clear view of how the pipeline develops.

In the early stages of that pipeline, women appear in greater numbers in revenue-oriented departments such as fundraising, corporate sales and sponsorships, business and finance, and ticketing. Yet the balance shifts as responsibility and authority rise. Similar to FBS and Power 4 trends, men increasingly dominate middle and senior management and hold a substantial majority of executive leadership posts. In fact, **men occupy roughly 71% of senior and executive positions within revenue-generating departments.** As a result, men disproportionately gain access to the high-leverage experiences and strategic skill sets widely viewed as prerequisites for becoming an athletic director.

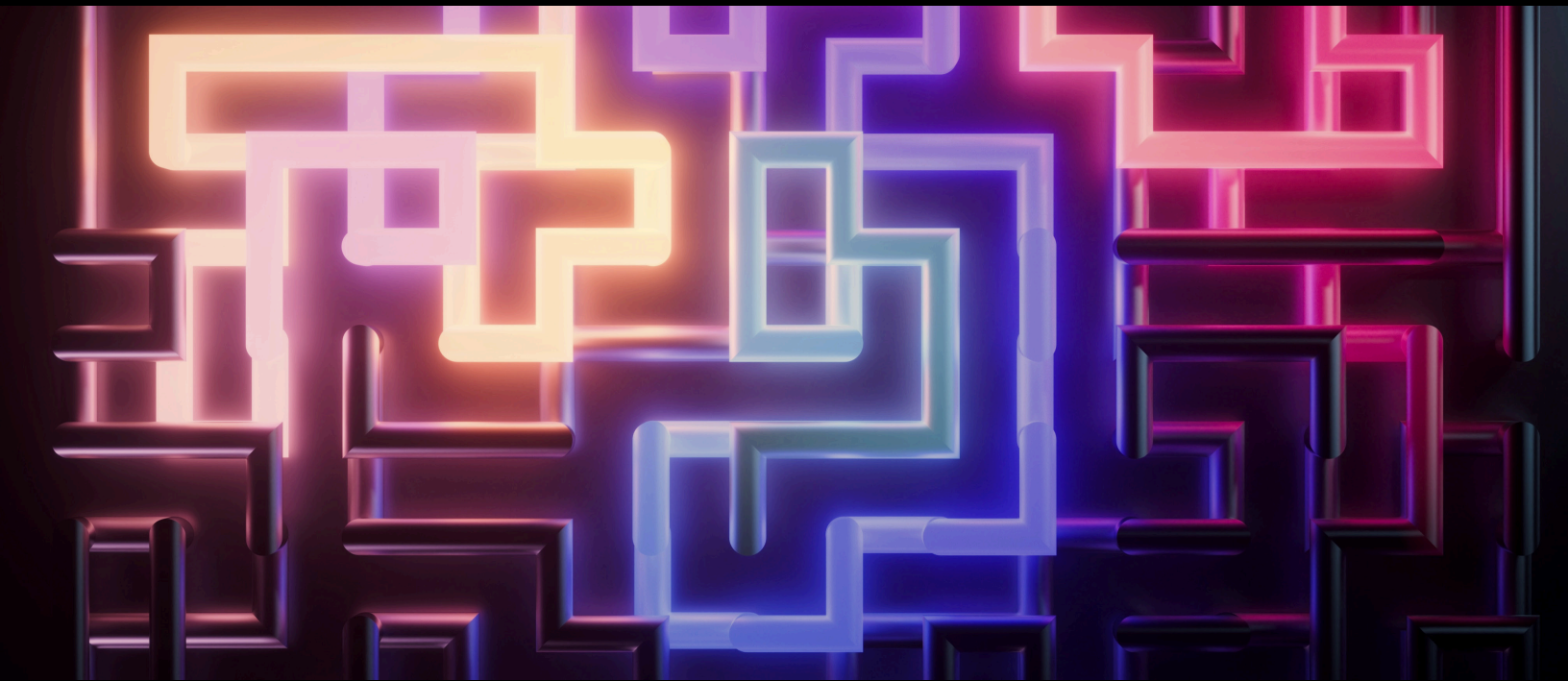
Staffing by Career Tier in Revenue Generating Departments



50

Group of 5 Conferences

**American
CUSA
MAC
MWC
Sunbelt**



Group of 5 Staffing Trends by Conference Year-over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions across all Power 4 athletic departments. Columns with (-) indicate divisions that were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

OVERALL Y-o-Y CONFERENCE	American % Change	CUSA % Change	MAC % Change	MWC % Change	Sun % Change
Athletic Administration	-9%	-16%	-9%	4%	-11%
Buildings and Grounds	-	-	-	-	-
Business Office*	-26%	46%	-12%	-32.6%	-52.6%
Campus Recreation	0%	0%	8%	0.0%	0.0%
Communications	-13%	2%	48%	13.6%	2.3%
Compliance	-14%	-18%	0.0%	-3.2%	-21.4%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships*	135%	4%	-4%	-11.1%	-35.8%
Equipment Operations	-	-	-	-	-
Event and Facility Operations	-	-	-	-	-
Fundraising*	-14%	22%	3%	8%	118%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	-19%	-65%	-51%	-28%	-18%
Media	36%	1400%	27%	48%	-10%
NIL*	267%	100%	0%	0%	100%
Sports Medicine	-5%	-5%	17%	27%	-6%
Sports Performance	-11%	2%	-24%	-24%	-17%
Student Athlete Services	-15%	28%	-12%	-3%	-16%
Ticket Sales*	12%	-20%	-3%	-19%	3%
OVERALL	-9.88%	-5.77%	-6.12%	-4.07%	-11.68%

American Aggregated Conference Data

14

**Colleges &
Universities**

**Army
Charlotte
East Carolina
Florida Atlantic
Memphis
Navy
North Texas**

**Rice
Temple
Tulane
Tulsa
Alabama-Birmingham
South Florida
UT San Antonio***

\$61,845,747

Median Athletic Department Revenue(1)

Range \$43,271,595 (Alabama-Birmingham) to \$103,549,435 (South Florida)

#157

**Median Conference
Learfield Ranking**

Range #78 (South Florida) to
#264 (North Texas)

1,296

**Total Athletic Department
Staff & Administration**

Does not include head coaches or
coaching staffs

1

**Women Athletic
Directors***

The American Conference Department Overview

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of men and women employed in staff and administrative positions in athletic departments in The American Conference.

	Total Male Employees	Total Female Employees	% Male	% Female
Athletic Administration	92	55	63%	37%
Buildings and Grounds	10	5	67%	33%
Business Office	17	37	31%	69%
Campus Recreation	0	0	0%	0%
Communications	54	14	79%	21%
Compliance	14	17	45%	55%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	38	9	81%	19%
Equipment Operations	31	2	94%	6%
Event and Facility Operations	47	20	70%	30%
Fundraising	47	26	64%	36%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	67	27	71%	29%
Media	33	1	97%	3%
NIL	5	6	45%	55%
Sports Medicine	89	109	45%	55%
Sports Performance	79	37	68%	32%
Student Athlete Services	35	88	28%	72%
Ticket Sales	39	18	68%	32%
Total Employees	697	471	60%	40%

American Staffing Trends by Function & Gender Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

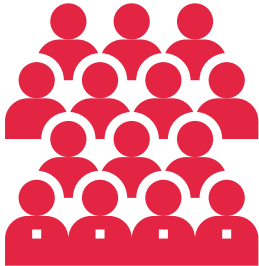
This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions and gender across SEC institutions. Three divisions -- Building & Grounds, Equipment Operations, and Event and Facility Operations -- were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Department	Men			Women		
	2024	2025	% Change	2024	2025	% Change
Athletic Administration	103	92	-10.7%	59	55	-6.8%
Buildings and Grounds	107	10	-	29	5	-
Business Office	31	17	-45.2%	42	37	-11.9%
Campus Recreation	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%
Communications	66	54	-18.2%	12	14	16.7%
Compliance	16	14	-12.5%	20	17	-15.0%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	16	38	137.5%	4	9	125.0%
Equipment Operations	-	31	-	-	2	-
Event & Facility Operations	12	47	-	7	20	-
Fundraising	50	47	-6.0%	35	26	-25.7%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	80	67	-16.3%	36	27	-25.0%
Media	21	33	57.1%	4	1	-75.0%
NIL	1	5	400.0%	2	6	200.0%
Sports Medicine	99	89	-10.1%	110	109	-0.9%
Sports Performance	85	79	-7.1%	46	37	-19.6%
Student Athlete Services	47	35	-25.5%	98	88	-10.2%
Ticket Sales	34	39	14.7%	17	18	5.9%
Technology	7	-	-	0	-	-
Travel	0	-	-	0	-	-
Concessions	0	-	-	0	-	-
TOTAL	775	697	-10.1%	521	471	-9.6%

The American Conference Employee Career Stages

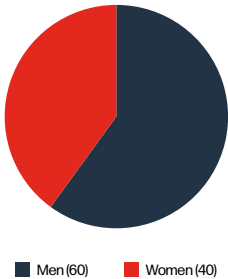
**Total Staff &
Administration**
1,168

Representing all Athletic
Departments in the Conference



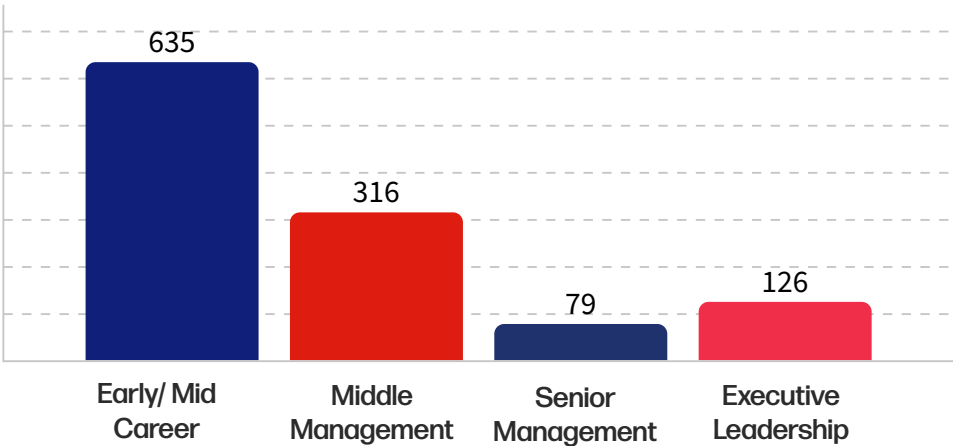
Gender Diversity

471 **697**
Women **Men**



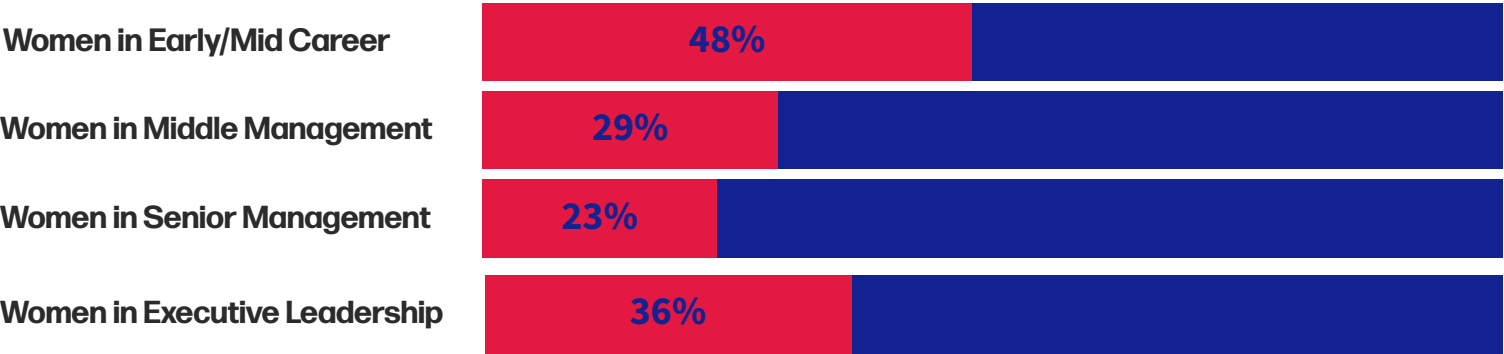
Career Stage

Number of employees in
entry/mid career, middle
management, senior and
executive management



Gender in Career Stage

Percentage of women in early/mid career, management, and executive leadership



CUSA Aggregated Conference Data

10

**Colleges &
Universities**

**Florida International
Jacksonville State
Kennesaw State
Liberty
Louisiana Tech**

**Middle Tennessee State
New Mexico State
Sam Houston
UT El Paso
Western Kentucky**

\$43,424,078

Median Athletic Department Revenue (1)

Range \$22,874,706 (Louisiana Tech) to \$52,440,075 (Middle Tennessee)

#197

**Median Conference
Learfield Ranking**

Range #97 (Liberty) to
#264 (Middle Tennessee)

670

**Total Athletic Department
Staff & Administration**

Does not include head coaches or
coaching staffs

0

**Women Athletic
Directors**

Conference USA Department Overview

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of men and women employed in staff and administrative positions in athletic departments in Conference USA

	Total Male Employees	Total Female Employees	% Male	% Female
Athletic Administration	75	31	71%	29%
Buildings and Grounds	1	0	100%	0%
Business Office	16	35	31%	69%
Campus Recreation	0	0	0%	0%
Communications	45	8	85%	15%
Compliance	10	4	71%	29%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	19	5	79%	21%
Equipment Operations	9	2	82%	18%
Event and Facility Operations	35	9	80%	20%
Fundraising	12	10	55%	45%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	22	5	81%	19%
Media	40	5	89%	11%
NIL	2	0	100%	0%
Sports Medicine	59	49	55%	45%
Sports Performance	50	11	82%	18%
Student Athlete Services	21	47	31%	69%
Ticket Sales	26	7	79%	21%
Total Employees	442	228	66%	34%

Conference USA Staffing Trends by Function & Gender Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions and gender across SEC institutions. Three divisions -- Building & Grounds, Equipment Operations, and Event and Facility Operations -- were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Department	Men			Women		
	2024	2025	% Change	2024	2025	% Change
Athletic Administration	90	75	-16.7%	36	31	-13.9%
Buildings and Grounds	38	1	-	6	0	-
Business Office	4	16	300.0%	31	35	12.9%
Campus Recreation	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%
Communications	45	45	0.0%	7	8	14.3%
Compliance	11	10	-9.1%	6	4	-33.3%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	17	19	11.8%	6	5	-16.7%
Equipment Operations	-	9	-	-	2	-
Event & Facility Operations	4	35	-	0	9	-
Fundraising	11	12	9.1%	7	10	42.9%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	57	22	-61.4%	20	5	-75.0%
Media	3	40	1233.3%	0	5	500.0%
NIL	1	2	100.0%	0	0	0.0%
Sports Medicine	63	59	-6.3%	51	49	-3.9%
Sports Performance	45	50	11.1%	15	11	-26.7%
Student Athlete Services	47	21	-55.3%	49	47	-4.1%
Ticket Sales	31	26	-16.1%	10	7	-30.0%
Technology	0	-	-	0	-	-
Travel	0	-	-	0	-	-
Concessions	0	-	-	0	-	-
TOTAL	467	442	-5.4%	244	228	-6.6%

Conference USA

Employee Career Stages

**Total Staff &
Administration**
670

Representing all Athletic
Departments in the Conference



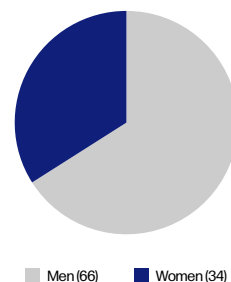
Gender Diversity

228

Women

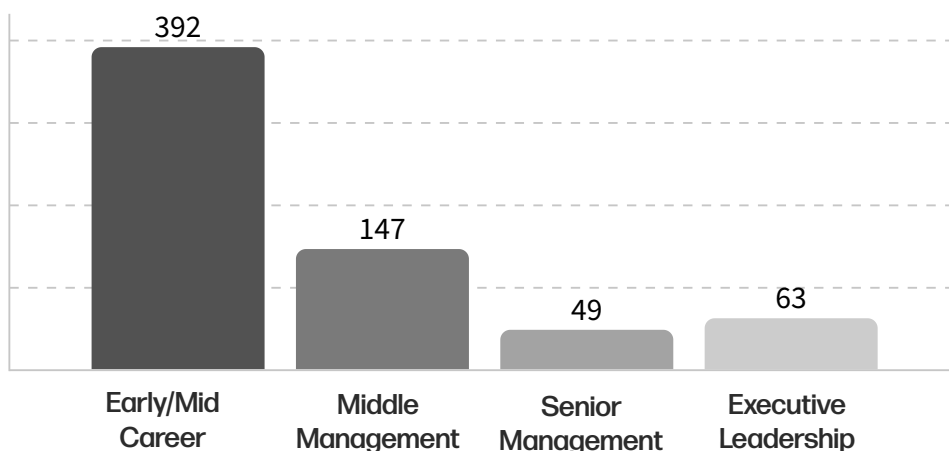
442

Men



Career Stage

Number of employees in
entry/mid career, middle
management, senior and
executive management



Gender in Career Stage

Percentage of women in early/mid career, management, and executive leadership

Women in Early/Mid Career

39%

Women in Middle Management

25%

Women in Senior Management

18%

Women in Executive Leadership

22%

MAC Aggregated Conference Data

12

**Colleges &
Universities**

**Akron
Ball State
Bowling Green State
Buffalo
Central Michigan*
Eastern Michigan**

**Kent State
Miami (OH)
Northern Illinois
Ohio
Toledo
Western Michigan**

\$36,897,818

Median Athletic Department Revenue (1)

Range \$29,239,753 (Northern Illinois) to \$42,261,274 (Buffalo)

#174

**Median Conference
Learfield Ranking**

Range #88 (Western Michigan)
to #264 (Bowling Green)

783

**Total Athletic Department
Staff & Administration**

Does not include head coaches or
coaching staffs

1

**Women Athletic
Directors***

Mid-American Conference Department Overview

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of men and women employed in staff and administrative positions in athletic departments in the Mid-American Conference.

	Total Male Employees	Total Female Employees	% Male	% Female
Athletic Administration	89	56	61%	39%
Buildings and Grounds	1	0	100%	0%
Business Office	8	22	27%	73%
Campus Recreation	8	6	57%	43%
Communications	28	12	70%	30%
Compliance	11	10	52%	48%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	16	6	73%	27%
Equipment Operations	24	7	77%	23%
Event and Facility Operations	41	12	77%	23%
Fundraising	24	15	62%	38%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	25	11	69%	31%
Media	13	1	93%	7%
NIL	2	0	100%	0%
Sports Medicine	97	74	57%	43%
Sports Performance	47	21	69%	31%
Student Athlete Services	25	36	41%	59%
Ticket Sales	25	10	71%	29%
Total Employees	484	299	62%	38%

MAC Staffing Trends by Function & Gender Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions and gender across SEC institutions. Three divisions -- Building & Grounds, Equipment Operations, and Event and Facility Operations -- were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Department	Men			Women		
	2024	2025	% Change	2024	2025	% Change
Athletic Administration	99	89	-10.1%	60	56	-6.7%
Buildings and Grounds	68	1	-	16	0	-
Business Office	11	8	-27.3%	23	22	-4.3%
Campus Recreation	5	8	0.0%	8	6	0.0%
Communications	17	28	64.7%	10	12	20.0%
Compliance	11	11	0.0%	10	10	0.0%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	19	16	-15.8%	7	6	-14.3%
Equipment Operations	-	24	-	-	7	-
Event & Facility Operations	1	41	-	1	12	-
Fundraising	24	24	0.0%	14	15	7.1%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	49	25	-49.0%	24	11	-54.2%
Media	10	13	30.0%	1	1	0.0%
NIL	2	2	0.0%	0	0	0.0%
Sports Medicine	79	97	22.8%	67	74	10.4%
Sports Performance	61	47	-23.0%	28	21	-25.0%
Student Athlete Services	33	25	-24.2%	36	36	0.0%
Ticket Sales	28	25	-10.7%	8	10	25.0%
Technology	2	-	-	1	-	-
Travel	0	-	-	0	-	-
Concessions	1	-	-	0	-	-
TOTAL	520	484	-6.9%	314	299	-4.8%

Mid-American Conference Employee Career Stages

Total Staff &
Administration
783

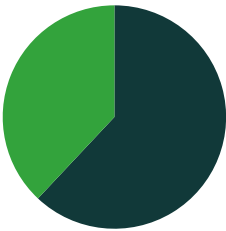
Representing all Athletic
Departments in the Conference



Gender Diversity

299
Women

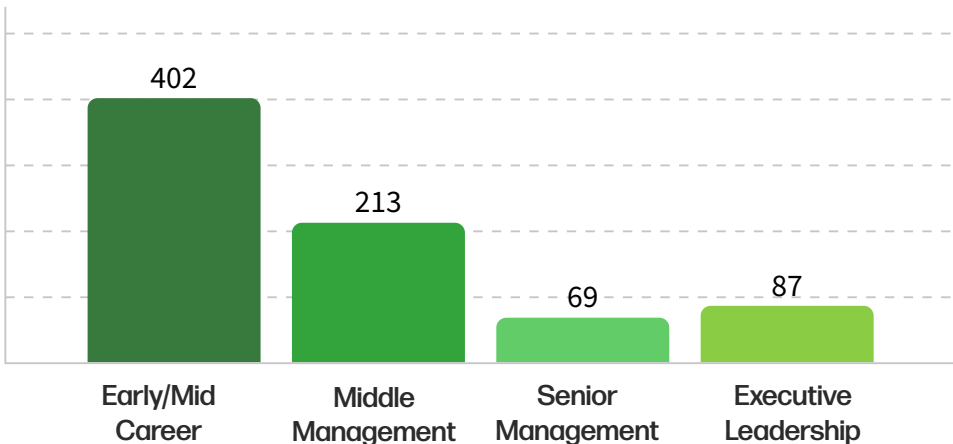
484
Men



Men (62) Women (38)

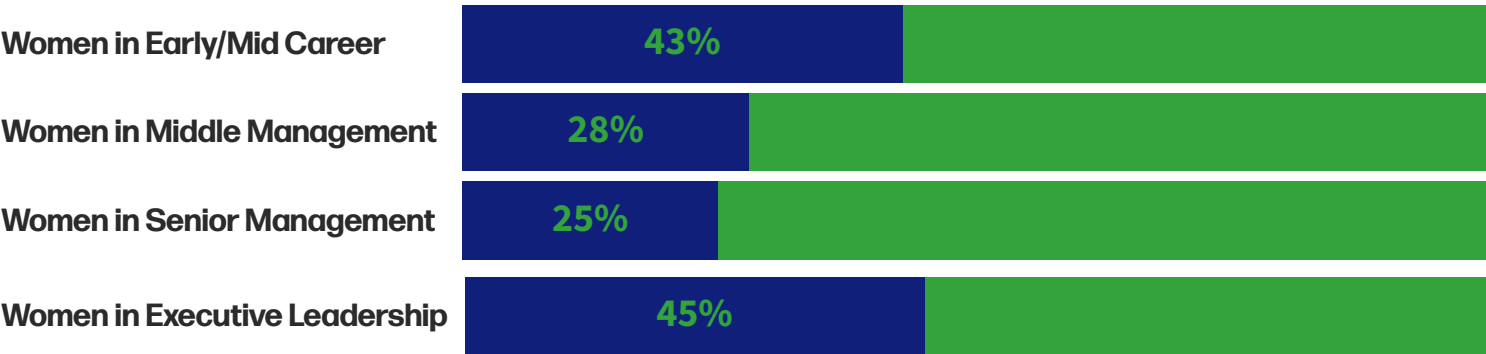
Career Stage

Number of employees in
entry/mid career, middle
management, senior and
executive management



Gender in Career Stage

Percentage of women in early/mid career, management, and executive leadership



Mountain West Aggregated Conference Data

12

**Colleges &
Universities**

**Air Force
Boise State
Colorado State
Fresno State
Hawai'i
Nevada***

**New Mexico
San Diego State
San Jose State
UNLV
Utah State
Wyoming**

\$56,901,874

Median Athletic Department Revenue(1)

Range \$44,239,752 (San Jose State) to \$91,423,101 (San Diego State)

#119

**Median Conference
Learfield Ranking**

Range #49 (Univ. of New Mexico) to
#244 (Nevada)

1,083

**Total Athletic Department
Staff & Administration**

Does not include head coaches or
coaching staffs

1

**Women Athletic
Directors**

Mountain West Conference Department Overview

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of men and women employed in staff and administrative positions in athletic departments in the Mountain West Conference.

	Total Male Employees	Total Female Employees	% Male	% Female
Athletic Administration	110	63	64%	36%
Buildings and Grounds	18	0	100%	0%
Business Office	26	32	45%	55%
Campus Recreation	5	5	50%	50%
Communications	36	14	72%	28%
Compliance	19	11	63%	37%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	27	13	68%	33%
Equipment Operations	36	9	80%	20%
Event and Facility Operations	61	18	77%	23%
Fundraising	39	28	58%	42%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	37	17	69%	31%
Media	31	6	84%	16%
NIL	2	0	100%	0%
Sports Medicine	91	90	50%	50%
Sports Performance	73	34	68%	32%
Student Athlete Services	27	42	39%	61%
Ticket Sales	49	14	78%	22%
Total Employees	687	396	63%	37%

Mountain West Staffing Trends by Function & Gender Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions and gender across SEC institutions. Three divisions -- Building & Grounds, Equipment Operations, and Event and Facility Operations -- were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Department	Men			Women		
	2024	2025	% Change	2024	2025	% Change
Athletic Administration	109	110	0.9%	57	63	10.5%
Buildings and Grounds	103	18	-	28	0	-
Business Office	33	26	-21.2%	53	32	-39.6%
Campus Recreation	0	5	0.0%	0	5	0.0%
Communications	33	36	9.1%	11	14	27.3%
Compliance	13	19	46.2%	18	11	-38.9%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	36	27	-25.0%	9	13	44.4%
Equipment Operations	-	36	-	-	9	-
Event & Facility Operations	3	61	-	2	18	-
Fundraising	37	39	5.4%	25	28	12.0%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	48	37	-22.9%	27	17	-37.0%
Media	18	31	72.2%	7	6	-14.3%
NIL	1	2	100.0%	1	0	0.0%
Sports Medicine	69	91	31.9%	74	90	21.6%
Sports Performance	91	73	-19.8%	50	34	-32.0%
Student Athlete Services	27	27	0.0%	44	42	-4.5%
Ticket Sales	54	49	-9.3%	24	14	-41.7%
Technology	21	-	-	2	-	-
Travel	0	-	-	5	-	-
Concessions	3	-	-	2	-	-
TOTAL	699	687	-1.7%	439	396	-9.8%

Mountain West Conference Employee Career Stages

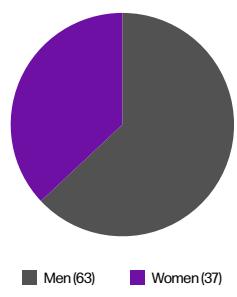
**Total Staff &
Administration**
1,083

Representing all Athletic
Departments in the Conference



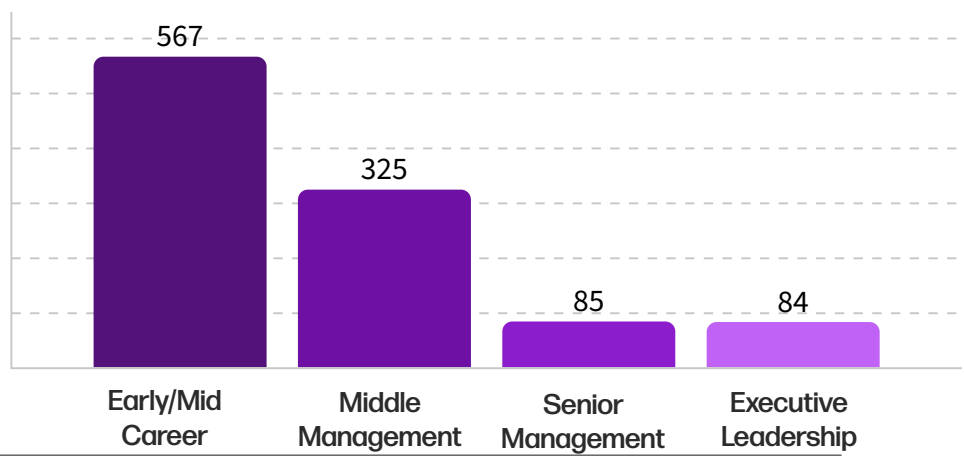
Gender Diversity

396 **687**
Women **Men**



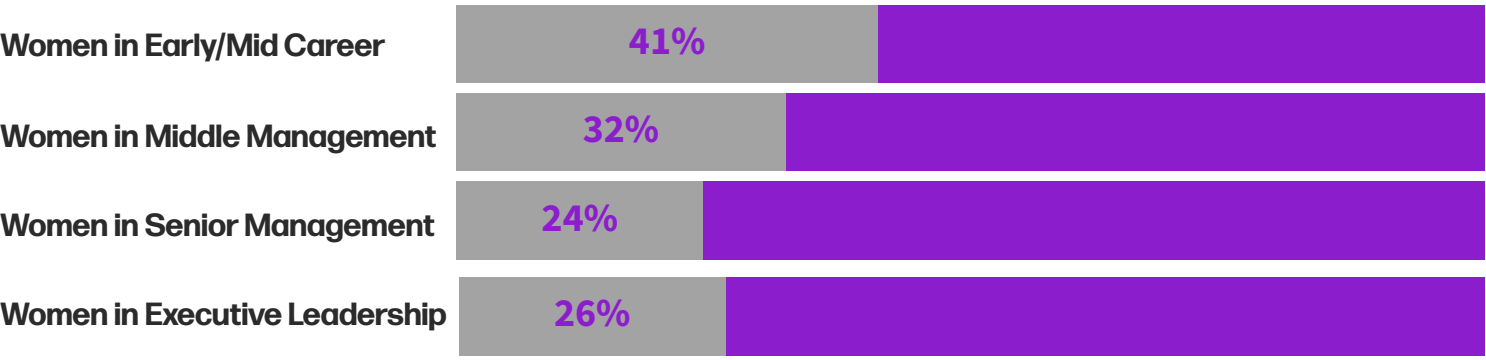
Career Stage

Number of employees in
entry/mid career, middle
management, senior and
executive management



Gender in Career Stage

Percentage of women in early/mid career, management, and executive leadership



Sunbelt Aggregated Conference Data

14

**Colleges &
Universities**

**Appalachian State
Arkansas State
Coastal Carolina
Georgia Southern
Georgia State
James Madison
Louisiana Lafayette**

**Louisiana Monroe
Marshall
Old Dominion
South Alabama
Southern Miss
Texas State
Troy**

\$38,062,602

Median Athletic Department Revenue (1)

Range \$18,233,877 (Louisiana Monroe) to \$53,007,165 (Old Dominion)

#191

**Median Conference
Learfield Ranking**

Range #111 (Coastal Carolina) to
#298 (Louisiana Monroe)

930

**Total Athletic Department
Staff & Administration**

Does not include head coaches or
coaching staffs

0

**Women Athletic
Directors)**

Sunbelt Conference Department Overview

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and percentage of men and women employed in staff and administrative positions in athletic departments in the Sunbelt Conference.

	Total Male Employees	Total Female Employees	% Male	% Female
Athletic Administration	83	56	60%	40%
Buildings and Grounds	13	1	93%	7%
Business Office	9	37	20%	80%
Campus Recreation	0	0	0%	0%
Communications	44	10	81%	19%
Compliance	11	16	41%	59%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	34	10	77%	23%
Equipment Operations	25	3	89%	11%
Event and Facility Operations	44	8	85%	15%
Fundraising	37	22	63%	37%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	36	14	72%	28%
Media	28	2	93%	7%
NIL	2	2	50%	50%
Sports Medicine	66	88	43%	57%
Sports Performance	76	20	79%	21%
Student Athlete Services	26	64	29%	71%
Ticket Sales	30	13	70%	30%
Total Employees	564	366	61%	39%

Sunbelt Staffing Trends by Function & Gender Year-Over-Year (2024 to 2025)

This table illustrates the aggregated proportion and year-over-year (y-o-y) change of staff by athletic department divisions and gender across SEC institutions. Three divisions -- Building & Grounds, Equipment Operations, and Event and Facility Operations -- were recoded for 2025; thus, y-o-y changes will be included in subsequent reports.

Department	Men			Women		
	2024	2025	% Change	2024	2025	% Change
Athletic Administration	93	83	-10.8%	61	56	-8.2%
Buildings and Grounds	81	13	-	9	1	-
Business Office	19	9	-52.6%	25	37	48.0%
Campus Recreation	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%
Communications	43	44	2.3%	11	10	-9.1%
Compliance	14	11	-21.4%	18	16	-11.1%
Corporate Sales and Sponsorships	53	34	-35.8%	30	10	-66.7%
Equipment Operations	-	25	-	-	3	-
Event & Facility Operations	9	44	-	5	8	-
Fundraising	17	37	117.6%	7	22	214.3%
Marketing and Fan Engagement	44	36	-18.2%	26	14	-46.2%
Media	31	28	-9.7%	6	2	-66.7%
NIL	1	2	100.0%	1	2	0.0%
Sports Medicine	70	66	-5.7%	100	88	-12.0%
Sports Performance	92	76	-17.4%	30	20	-33.3%
Student Athlete Services	31	26	-16.1%	82	64	-22.0%
Ticket Sales	29	30	3.4%	15	13	-13.3%
Technology	0	-	-	0	-	-
Travel	0	-	-	0	-	-
Concessions	0	-	-	0	-	-
TOTAL	627	564	-10.0%	426	366	-14.1%

Sunbelt Conference Employee Career Stages

**Total Staff &
Administration**
930

Representing all Athletic
Departments in the Conference



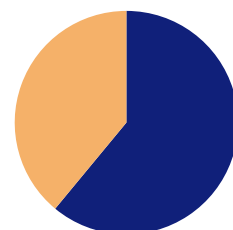
Gender Diversity

366

Women

564

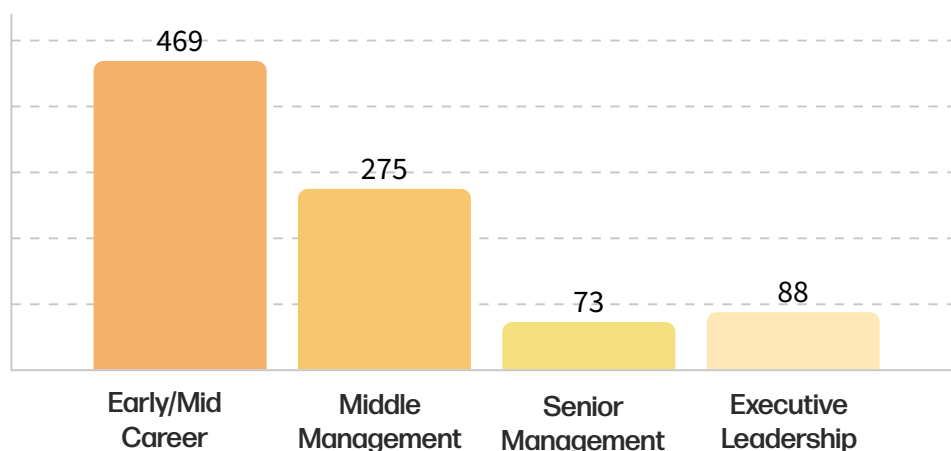
Men



■ Men (61) ■ Women (39)

Career Stage

Number of employees in
entry/mid career, middle
management, senior and
executive management



Gender in Career Stage

Percentage of women in early/mid career, management, and executive leadership

Women in Early/Mid Career

45%

Women in Middle Management

32%

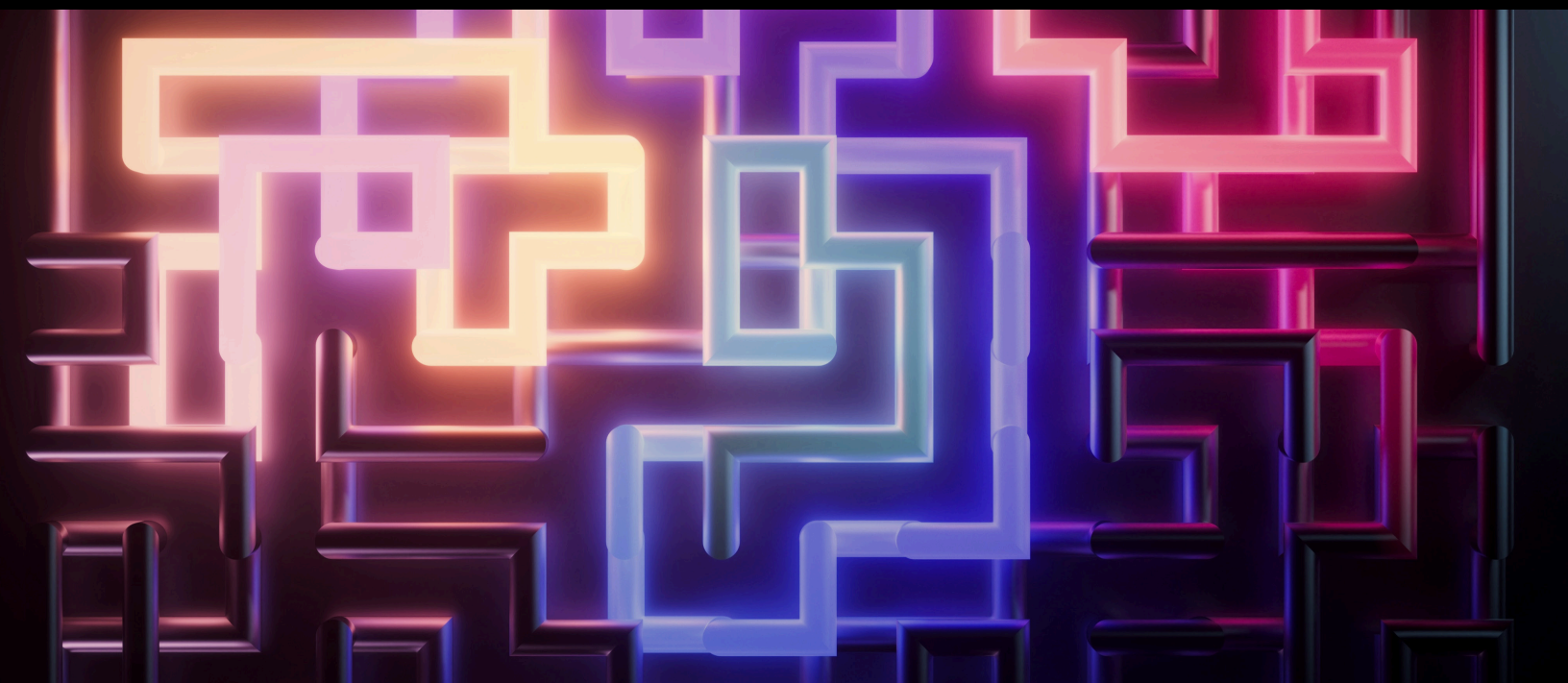
Women in Senior Management

27%

Women in Executive Leadership

33%

⁷² Key Insights & Solutions



Key Insights & Solutions

Athletic Administrators

- 1. Re-anchor around strategic priorities rather than historical structures.** The rapid rise of NIL, media, business operations, and revenue units signals where competitive advantage is being built. Leaders should:
 - i. Clarify which functions deserve strategic investment and which can be streamlined and/or connected with existing campus resources (e.g., academic advising).
 - ii. Revisit org charts for coherence. For example, growth in media may justify consolidating marketing/communications under larger storytelling units.
 - iii. Ensure new hires are building capacity for long-term needs rather than short-term trend chasing. As fiscal landscapes settle, intentionality around long-term needs becomes paramount.
- 2. Protect the student-athlete experience in an era of consolidation.** Even if academic and student support functions move to campus units, athletic departments must ensure:
 - i. Service continuity is well-coordinated across campus. Consider professional development activities and workshops for faculty and staff to learn more about the athlete experience.
 - ii. Student-athletes still feel anchored by people and pathways. Building and maintaining connections with student support staff and faculty across campus can be critical in athlete retention.
- 3. Shore up internal capacity for change management.** With business operations (e.g., HR, legal, analytics) ballooning, departments are quietly acknowledging that the compliance/risk environment is more complex than ever -- for athletes, coaches, and athletic administrators. Leadership should:
 - i. Incorporate business analytics into the decision-making process. While data shouldn't dictate choices, it should guide the decision.
 - ii. Invest in people who can interpret the data landscape, not just manage it.
 - iii. Build internal training so staff feel supported through structural change -- in the athletic department and the NCAA.
- 4. Plan for volatility, not stability.** The Big Ten may be the only conference to increase staff, but its growth foreshadows where others may need to follow once budgets stabilize. Leadership should:
 - i. Treat 2025–2028 as a transition period. Take time to consider strategic investments that support long term financial success and the mission of the department and institution.
 - ii. Scenario-plan staffing models under multiple revenue assumptions (settlements, media deals, revenue sharing).
 - iii. Build agile staffing structures that can flex without crumbling.
- 5. Prioritize staff well-being, especially in areas experiencing contraction.** In many departments, marketing, communications, student-athlete services, and sport performance units are carrying heavier loads with fewer hands. Managers should:
 - i. Monitor workload drift and burnout warning signs. Managers would do well to develop a culture of communication that allows for staff to share ideas and strategies to mitigate overwork.
 - ii. Redistribute responsibilities consciously, not reactively.
 - iii. Provide clearer roles and boundaries as units merge or shrink.

Key Insights & Solutions

Industry Leaders

1. Utilize *The Pipeline Project* for promoting industry-wide change

- a. Although the data collected and analyzed for *The Pipeline Project* reflects changes in intercollegiate athletics, the data might indicate changes across the sport industry where revenue generation is becoming increasingly important with ballooning media rights deals, private equity financing, and increased sponsorship opportunities
- b. Consider reflecting on the recommendations offered in the key insights for athletic administrators to inform professional development activities and offerings.

2. Identify opportunities for engaging in research and education

- a. Support ongoing academic research into staffing trends in college sport.
- b. Assist in developing collaborative relationships between researchers and practitioners to develop actionable solutions. These relationships are advantageous to both parties as both have practical experience and expertise on the college sport landscape.
- c. Collaborate with universities to offer more coursework, seminars, and professional development opportunities focused on leadership and management (especially for early career and middle management) and belonging and inclusion.

3. Explore external factors or industries influencing the changes in intercollegiate athletics

- a. Invite industry professionals influencing change to speak to what is occurring externally from intercollegiate athletics such as those involved in advocating for college athletes from the House settlement, those working in and around NIL collectives, or those in the sport betting and gambling industry. These professionals might offer insight into what is coming that can better prepare athletic departments for changes in the future.

Key Insights & Solutions

Entry- and Middle Level Professionals

1. Build Skills Aligned With Growth Areas. The biggest staffing increases are in NIL, media/content, business operations, revenue generation, and analytics. That means:

- a. Discover the ins and outs of NIL operations, licensing, contract essentials, and who's behind the scenes making it all work!
- b. Build digital media competence: content strategy, storytelling, analytics, platforms. Access resources -- people, software, academic courses -- to build your understanding.
- c. Strengthen quantitative literacy: Excel, Tableau/Power BI, budgeting, forecasting. Find educational opportunities on your campus or via resources like LinkedIn Learning and [Coursera](#).
- d. Understand revenue ecosystems: sponsorships, ticketing, fundraising, fan engagement.

2. Become Fluent in the New Compliance & Legal Environment. With the House settlement reshaping college sports, departments are adding roles in HR, legal support, and policy interpretation. To stand out:

- a. Learn the basics of athlete compensation models, revenue-sharing implications, and HR practices.
- b. Continue seeking information from sources such as [D-1 Ticker](#), [Front Office Sports](#), [Sports Business Journal](#), [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), [Inside Higher Ed](#), and other media outlets to stay up to date with changes in the college athletics and higher education landscape.
- c. Use industry associations (e.g., [NACDA](#), [Women Leaders in Sports](#)) for career development and advocacy for gender equity.

3. Strengthen Your Cross-Functional Muscles. Departments are becoming more interdisciplinary. Media teams blend with marketing; student services collaborate with campus partners; business operations influence strategy. To stay competitive:

- a. Volunteer for projects that allow you to work with other athletic department and campus offices.
- b. Learn how different functional areas connect to the department's revenue engine.
- c. Cultivate relationships across campus (e.g., admissions, student affairs) and the conference (e.g., committees).
- d. Explore what others are doing across different industries that might be applicable for enhancing your workplace.

4. Prioritize Business Literacy as a Core Leadership Skill. The surge in business office roles (31.6% growth) is a beacon:

- a. Understand budgets, contracts, vendor relationships, and HR processes.
- b. Learn how decisions get made financially, not just operationally.
- c. Position yourself as someone who thinks about investments, not just tasks.

5. Protect Your Well-Being and Boundaries. Shrinking units such as marketing, student-athlete services, and sport performance may create workload creep. Professionals should:

- a. Set and communicate boundaries.
- b. Track your responsibilities; ask for clarity during restructures.
- c. Seek mentorship to navigate moments of burnout or role drift.

6. Stay Agile — the System Will Continue to Change. From NIL to employment models to media rights, college sports is entering a decade of continual shift. Early and mid-career professionals should:

- a. Treat adaptability as a skill. Consider when you had to pivot quickly on a plan and what you learned from it.
- b. Update your résumé every 6–12 months, which will also illustrate and/or demonstrate if you are strengthening those "cross-functional muscles" mentioned above.

Key Insights & Solutions

Prospective Employees and Current Students

College athletics is in one of its most transformative eras. For those looking to enter the field, this moment offers both challenge and opportunity, and the professionals who thrive will be those who understand how the landscape is shifting and where new pathways are emerging.

1. Traditional Departments Are Evolving, Not Disappearing. Some areas (marketing, communications, student-athlete services) are seeing staffing declines, but they remain essential to the mission.

What's changing:

- a. These units are merging with digital media, data, and campus partnerships.
- b. Newcomers who bring hybrid abilities — storytelling plus analytics, or advising plus technology — will stand out.
- c. Expect to be asked to do more based on your skill set. Or, be willing to adopt an approach where you are learning, developing, and applying new skills. Growth and advancement take time. Don't expect a raise (besides cost of living, and that's not guaranteed!) or promotion in your first year.

2. Skills Matter. The field increasingly rewards what you can do, not just where you've worked. High-value skills include:

- a. Data and financial literacy
- b. Social and digital media, including storytelling and brand development
- c. Relationship-building and collaboration

3. Human-Centered Work Still Anchors the Industry. Despite the staffing shifts, one thing remains constant: college athletics is built on relationships. Prospective professionals should:

- a. Demonstrate empathy, communication, and conflict-resolution skills.
- b. Show comfort working with diverse groups of student-athletes, coaches, administration, and campus stakeholders.
- c. Understand that trust and integrity are core currencies in this profession.

4. Expect Agility to Be Part of Your Career DNA. Teams are reorganizing. Job descriptions are evolving. Some departments are growing while others are shrinking. Instead of expecting a linear career path, be prepared for a) role shifts, b) cross-department collaborations, and c) opportunities to stretch into new areas.

- a. Develop a 5-year career plan focused on growth, not titles. ([How to Develop a 5-Year career plan](#))

5. There Is Room for Purpose-Driven Work. Even with the industry's financial and legal shifts, the heart of college athletics beats the same: a) supporting student-athletes, b) building community, c) shaping meaningful experiences, and d) creating opportunities for learning and belonging.

6. Prepare for a Field That Values Initiative. With some departments shrinking, proactive professionals will rise fastest. Show that you:

- a. Can identify problems and propose solutions
- b. Take ownership of your work
- c. Learn new systems without waiting to be asked
- d. Bring energy, creativity, and professionalism

Key Insights & Solutions

Educators & Research Teams

- 1. Research Staffing Trends in Sport Management.** The dramatic changes in staffing amongst different departments in intercollegiate athletics offer the opportunity for more insight into the decision-making amongst leaders of these athletic departments. There is a strong opportunity for further research on staffing trends, organizational decision-making, and external factors influencing these changes.
- 2. Curriculum development around changes in intercollegiate athletics.** With staffing changes around NIL, media/content, business operations, revenue generation, and analytics increasing, it is vital for educators to adopt a revenue-generation centric focus in curriculum around these topics. Preparing students for the incoming changes and value created by adopting a fiscal mindset.
- 3. Mentor Women Students.** In 2024, women were well-represented in entry-level roles but now there is a decline in representation in these roles as well as roles in management and leadership. Educators should mentor women-identified students, connect them with professional organizations (e.g., Women Leaders in Sports), and provide guidance on leadership and career development.
- 4. Develop Leadership Programs.** There is a clear need for leadership programs to prepare women and underrepresented groups for senior roles. Collaboration between academic and athletic departments can create workshops, internships, and mentoring opportunities that build essential skills for leadership.
- 5. Address Structural Barriers.** The drop in women's representation as a whole signals structural barriers like bias and lack of sponsorship. Research on these factors can inform policies that create more equitable career pathways.
- 6. Engage All Students and Faculty.** *The Pipeline Project* offers insights into staffing trends in intercollegiate athletics, but we encourage departments or colleges of social works, business, human resources, and communications to engage in work in their specific area. Using the data shared by The Pipeline Project can offer a more target approach by encouraging new research in these fields and not restricted to specifically sport management.
- 7. Create Partnerships.** Academic and athletic departments should collaborate to address gender diversity gaps by developing leadership programs, internships, and research initiatives. Partnerships with community sports organizations can also help advance women in the broader sports industry.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is *The Pipeline Project*?

The purpose of *The Pipeline Project* is to capture the dynamic job positions and management structures of NCAA Division I athletic departments and conferences. More specifically, *The Pipeline Project* illustrates how men and women are represented in various positions and athletic department management and leadership structures. This data does not include coaches or coaching staffs.

Why is *The Pipeline Project* important?

For more than 5 decades, sport management scholars and practitioners have expressed concern that women and racial and sexual minorities may have less access and opportunity to progress through athletic department structures to decision-making positions; therefore, *The Pipeline Project* serves as a resource to identify "leaks" in talent pipelines both in job areas (e.g., compliance, marketing) and managerial tiers (i.e., early/mid-career, middle and senior management, executive leadership). The report focuses only on gender (see also Acknowledgements, page 57)

Who is the audience for *The Pipeline Project*?

The Pipeline Project is designed to serve as a resource for intercollegiate athletic administrators, professional organizations that serve intercollegiate athletic personnel, and current and future sports managers to help them understand job positions, employment trends, and the overall state of gender diversity within job positions and leadership structures. Academicians across disciplines are also encouraged to use this data to build research projects and long-term research agendas.

How was data for *The Pipeline Project* collected?

The research team pulled data from athletic department directories for each university in the Power Four [Big Ten, Big 12, Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Southeastern Conference (SEC)] and Group of Five [American Conference (AAC), Conference USA (CUSA), Mid-American Conference (MAC), Mountain West Conference (MWC), Sun Belt Conference (SBC)] between May and June 2025. Data included names, titles, and departments. Universities were included in the conference they were expected to represent for the academic year 2025-2026.

What does this report include?

The Pipeline Project examines at staff and administrative positions and trends (annual and year-over-year) within individual athletic departments, conferences, and aggregated data for the Power 4 and Group of 5 conferences which also constitute the NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision. It does not include data on coaches or coaching staffs. Moreover, this report includes data on gender, but does not yet include data on race and ethnicity.

How were career stages defined?

Ott and Beaumont (2020) originally categorized titles of athletic staff as entry-level, mid-level tier II, mid-level tier I, and executive. Following the inaugural 2024 report, the research team recoded career tiers to account for early and mid-career professionals with relevant experience who perform complex tasks and contribute to department operations, but do not serve in managerial capacities. Middle managers oversee specific teams, functions, or units and are responsible for translating strategic goals into operational plans. Senior managers lead multiple units or major functional areas (e.g., student services, finance and capital projects, external affairs) and provide strategic input and oversee complex operations, often holding authority over budget, policy, and personnel decisions within their areas. The executive tier acknowledges additional administrative decision-makers beyond the athletic director.

How did the research team account for gender?

The research team collected data from athletic department directories for each university in the Power 4 and Group of 5. For additional information on gender, please refer to the "Acknowledgments" section on page 57.

How do I cite *The Pipeline Project*?

Hancock, M.G., Kopka, N., & Green, E.R. (2025). *The Pipeline Project: 2025 Athletic Department Staffing Trends: NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS)* [white paper]. University of Louisville.

For inquiries, please contact Meg Hancock (meg.hancock@louisville.edu).

Dedication

The Pipeline Project is dedicated to the pioneering individuals and relentless advocates who have fought for gender equality in intercollegiate athletics. While there is still work to be done, their courage, perseverance, and unwavering commitment have paved the way for a more inclusive and equitable landscape in sports. Their efforts have not only transformed opportunities for women/femme athletes but have also inspired a generation to continue the work toward equality and justice. We honor their legacy and are grateful for their invaluable contributions to intercollegiate athletics.

A special thanks to scholars past and present who have examined the experiences of intercollegiate employees, especially those in minoritized populations.

Dr. Hancock would like to especially thank the following scholars and practitioners -- you lead, I follow: Laura Burton, Sally Shaw, Josie Harper, Marlene Dixon, Ehren Green, Brenda Pitts, Nefertiti Walker, Elizabeth Taylor, Amy Calabrese, Heidi Grappendorf, Janelle Wells, AJ Grube, Gale Rhodes, George Cunningham, Warren Whisenant, Alyssa Murphy, Nicole Melton, Jaqueline McDowell, Jenny McGarry, Ajhanai Keaton, Joy DeSensi, R. Vivian Acosta, Linda Jean Carpenter, Mary Hums, Glenna Bower, Vicky Chun, Drew Galbraith, Ann Marie Guglieri, Bonnie Tiell, Barbara Osbourne, Lisa Kihl, Janet Fink, Akilah Carter-Francique, Matt Huml, Windy Dees, Jennifer Hoffman, Karen Danychuk, Donna Pastore, Mary Jo Kane, Erin Buzuvus, Lindsey Darwin, Alicia Cintron, Sarah Williams, Erianne Weight, Christine Grant, Ellen Staurowsky, the leaders, coaches, and athletes of the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), and my current and former students.

Acknowledgements

Data Collection. Data for *The Pipeline Project* was collected in May and June 2025. The research team recognizes that people may change departments or stop-out of working in college athletics.

Gender. The research team acknowledges that data presented in *The Pipeline Project* predominantly reflects the binary understanding of gender (man/woman). This is a result of the data sources available. However, the research team of *The Pipeline Project* recognize that gender is a complex and fluid construct that extends beyond binary categories. Gender fluidity, non-binary identities, and other gender experiences are valid and significant aspects of the broader gender spectrum.

While this report may not fully encompass all aspects of gender diversity, we are committed to acknowledging and valuing the range of gender identities and experiences of staff members and administrators in intercollegiate athletics. You matter and you count. If you would like to share your gender identity for inclusion in this report and in conjunction with your respective institution, conference, and/or aggregated Power 4/Group of 5 data, please contact Meg Hancock (meg.hancock@louisville.edu).

Race and ethnicity. The research team acknowledges *The Pipeline Project* does not include data on race or ethnicity. We recognize this is a short-coming of this inaugural report. Future data collection and analyses will aim to incorporate a more inclusive perspective on race and ethnicity, as there is data to suggest people with multiple minoritized identities may encounter more barriers to accessing and moving through the pipeline.

Footnotes

(1) NCAA. (2024). NCAA Demographics Database.

(2) Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics. (2025). Knight-Newhouse College Athletics Database.

(3) See reference list: Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Grappendorf et al., 2004.

(4) See reference list: Dickman et al., 2021; Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Grappendorf et al., 2004; wood et al., 2019)

(5) See reference list: Acosta & Carpernter, 2011; Burton, 2015; Hoffman, 2011; Lapchick, 2023

(6) See reference list: Burton, 2015; Burton et al., 2009; Burton et al., 2011; Darvin et al., 2021; Dixon et al., 2007; Hancock & Hums, 215, 2016; Hardin et al., 2022; Keaton, 2022; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Taylor et al, 2024; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor & Wells 2017

(7) See reference list: Burton, 2015; Burton et al., 2009; Burton et al., 2011 Darvin et al., 2021; Dixon et al., 2007; Hancock & Hums, 215, 2016; Hardin et al., 2022; Keaton, 2022; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Taylor et al, 2024; Taylor et al., 2017; Taylor & Wells 2017

(8) See reference list: Hancock & Hums, 2015, 2016; Hancock et al., 2024; Taylor et al., 2024; Taylor & Wells, 2017

(9) Adopted from Ott & Beaumont, 2020

(10) See reference list: Cunningham (2015); Howe and Rockhill (2020); Keaton & Cooper (2022); McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Melton & Cunningham (2014); Shim et al. (2020).

(11) Hancock et al., 2024

(12) Bower, 2009; Hancock et al., 2017; Wells & Hancock, 2017

(13) Wells & Hancock, 2017

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