

**Perceptions of Students, Faculty, and Administrators About Pregame Tailgate Parties at a
Kentucky Regional University**

Steve Shih-Chia Chen, Stephaine Teater, *Morehead State University*, Brian Whitaker, Ph.D
Appalachian State University

ABSTRACT

This study specifically examined three main factors affecting 343 respondents' (235 students, 88 faculty, and 20 administrators) interest and motives for attending pre-game tailgate events, which are considered as a rich celebratory ritual of college football. These factors included: (1) the primary reasons for participation in tailgating; (2) the potential problems and risks related to hosting a tailgate; and (3) recommendations for operating a safe tailgate party. Practical strategies on control of alcohol consumption, promotional for the tailgate events, and regulatory policies for developing tailgating events were identified and discussed based on the results.

INTRODUCTION

College football has been a vital form of social event and entertainment for students on campuses and many other spectators from the local community. Scholars often found that college football fans have a strong level of loyalty and devotion to the school teams they support. It is also believed that participating in spectator events such as college sports could bring positive benefits to ones' wellbeing (Wann, 2006). Pregame tailgate parties on college campuses are an inseparable part of the football games. They are rich American sport traditions that have potential to generate hype and also controversy. Although the tailgate parties are popular and

www.IJDSM.org

www.IJDSM.net

well-attended, there are numerous issues associated with these parties, such as excessive alcohol consumption causing drunk-driving, vandalism, and riots. Should a higher education institution host pregame tailgate parties on campus? This question challenges numerous college presidents and athletic administrators to think critically about these issues. To gain more insights about this challenging question, this study delves three main topics: (1) examining the interests and concerns of the university students, faculty, staff, and administrators regarding attending pregame tailgate parties; (2) evaluating challenges and benefits regarding hosting pregame tailgate parties on campus; and (3) proposing practical solutions and suggestions to execute safe and fun tailgate parties for the students and community members.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The tradition of tailgating and problems associated with the events

According to Allison (2005), tailgating prior to football games dated back as early as the 1800s.

As early as the first collegiate game was held between Rutgers and Princeton, southern sport fans began this tradition by pigging out and serving serve up wild fish and game before kick-off. The tradition of tailgating caught on with fans during the 1970s (Allison, 2005). Today, tailgating is generalized as a rite of passage for football fans to enjoy fun and satiate with foods.

Unfortunately, tailgating has also become synonymous with heavy drinking.

Many football powerhouse institutions hold pregame tailgate parties around their stadium.

However, excessive consumption of alcohol from fans and students has become a “sober” dilemma for the school administrators and local law enforcement. High risk or heavy drinking is a serious health issue for colleges and universities all around the United States. This kind of behavior often leads to unintentional injuries (motor vehicle accidents, falls, and drowning),

www.IJDSM.org

www.IJDSM.net

sexually transmitted diseases and infections, unintended pregnancies, violence, and poor academic performance (Glassman, Werch, Jobli, & Bian, 2007; Oster-Aaland & Neighbors, 2007). Heavy drinking during the games or tailgating may result in fans insulting or humiliating each other and causing a public disturbance or damaging property (Oster-Aaland & Neighbors, 2007; USA 2009b; Woodyard & Hallan, 2010). The potential problems caused by drinking inspire many people to question the function and purpose of pregame tailgating events, which can be entertaining and family-oriented.

Other than the potential excessive consumption of alcohol, several issues and concerns related to tailgating on college campuses were identified by media and scholars as well (Bormann & Stone, 2001; Flynn, Lenkowitz, & Ward, n.d.; Unknown, 2010; USA Today, 2009b). Those problems included: (1) Noise and damage to the environment; (2) congestion of traffic around the campus; (3) financial burden for hosting the events; (4) decrease of sales at university concession stands; (5) increase of the alcohol related traffic accidents, and potential conflict (violent acts); and (6) creation of a bad reputation associated with the university. The aforementioned concerns and potential risks certainly degrade the value of tailgating and make an individual thinking twice about participating in that type of event.

The benefits associated with tailgating

Aside from a few out-of-control individuals who do not drink in moderation, the majority of people still enjoy the atmosphere and good foods at the tailgating events. There are several well-accepted benefits associated with the hosting the tailgating events. They include: (1) generating more student support toward the athletic program; (2) promoting a strong school spirit, (3) providing a fun atmosphere for the students and fans, (4) increasing the game attendance, and (5)

www.IJDSM.org

www.IJDSM.net

bringing better food services to the fans (Adams, 2006; Armes, 2005; Dickerson, 2004; Drenten, Peters, Leigh, & Hollenbeck, 2009; Eastern Michigan University, 2008a; Tailgate Station, 2007; Unknown, 2010). In addition, Dixon (2009) estimated the private consumption benefits derived from the college football game experience. Based on the responses of 769 fans of University of South Carolina \$75 million in private consumption benefits were generated in the 2008 football season. This figure implies that each tailgating participant spends \$168.80 per game in private consumption to benefit the community.

Policies and strategies for controlling drinking during the games or tailgating

Increased alcohol consumption and elevated emotions usually lead to aggression thus, explaining fan/spectator aggression, riots, stampedes, fights, fatal beatings, and rowdy crowds. To minimize the aforementioned problems for operating a safe game and tailgating atmosphere, numerous sport organizations have adopted alcohol-control policy to combat excessive drinking during sport events. Teams of the National Football Leagues such as New York Giants and the New York Jets, have a zero tolerance policy for inappropriate and rowdy behavior due to excessive drinking (National Football League, 2009; New York Giants, 2008). Both teams also shorten the tailgating time from 7 hours to 5 hours. Season ticket holders who are ejected from the stadium will also have their seats revoked. The National Collegiate Athletic Association Executive committee promotes “legal and responsible use of alcohol by fans outside the stadium or arena (e.g., tailgating). It prohibits alcoholic beverage sale during all intercollegiate athletic events in facilities on campus. It also prohibits on-site advertising of alcohol beverages with alcohol volume exceeding 6% (Williams, n.d.). The University of Colorado even takes a step further by

www.IJDSM.org

www.IJDSM.net

banning alcohol sales in all sport events due to numerous ejections, arrests, assaults, and referrals to judicial affairs caused by drunkenness (Bormann & Stone, 2001).

In order to minimize excessive drinking from the fans and other problems, numerous intercollegiate athletic departments have provided the following useful policies to monitor the tailgating event (Appalachian State University, 2008; Eastern Michigan University, 2008b; University of Massachusetts, 2008; University of West Georgia, n.d.; University of Wisconsin Stout, 2009; USA Today 2009a):

- (1) Designating organization/group captains to self-monitor the parties;
- (2) Restricting hours of tailgating before and after the competition (i.e., 2~4 hours prior to the kick off of the games and ends within 2 hours after the game);
- (3) Confining tailgating areas by setting up signs and marking the zone; and
- (4) Banning alcohol consumption in the form of cans and bottles.

Research on motives for attending tailgate events

Previous paragraphs discuss both positive and negative consequences associated with tailgating.

There seems to be plenty of reasons for an individual to choose either supporting or opposing tailgating. In reality, how do sport fans actually perceive and react toward those suggested reasons? Do football fans all over the country fully embrace tailgating and recognize its benefits? Many past studies have delved the factors that motivate spectators to attend sport events (Author, Salazar, & Fitzgerald, 2009; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002; Swanson, Gwinner, Larson, & Janda, 2003; Wann, Grieve, Zapalac, & Pease, 2008; Wells, Southall, & Peng, 2000). Those motivational factors often include social interaction, psychological motivation (i.e., eustress, escape, and self-esteem), performance and winning,

www.IJDSM.org

www.IJDSM.net

influence of star athletes, entertainment, and economic factor. However, according to Drenten et al. (2009), studies on motives for attendance and social rituals relating to pregame tailgating events were rarely found. James, Breezeel, and Ross (2001) concluded two influential factors affect spectators attending tailgate parties, (1) to escape their normal routine and (2) to enjoy social interaction. In their recent study based on a series of interviews of 45 college football fans, Drenten et al. (2009) further identified a couple of additional factors that explain the behavior of the spectators attending the tailgating events. In addition, besides the two factors of personal involvement and social interaction, inter-temporal sentiment (retrospection and propection) and identity (collectivism and individualism) also affect the spectators' commitment to the ritual of tailgating. Currently information regarding the control policy for tailgating is available on many websites. However, there is no specific study focusing on the tailgating participants' and administrators' perceptions toward the benefits and concerns relating to pregame tailgating events.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedure

The participants of this study were 342 students ($n = 235$), faculty and staff ($n = 88$) and administrators ($n = 19$) from a regional state institution in the Appalachian region. The two hundred thirty-five student participants were randomly-selected to participate in the survey under the following occasions: (1) while attending two basketball home-games of the 2009-10 season, (2) while attending classes, and (3) while hanging around the Student Union and quad. The faculty, staff and administrators were also recruited via two ways. The researchers approached them personally either at their office or during the staff meetings. They chose to participate

voluntarily afterward. The collection of responses and processing of data lasted from October 2009 to February 2010.

Instrumentation

A self-designed 46-item questionnaire was created based on the concepts and suggested information found in the past literature (Drenten et al., 2009; James et al, 2001). The 46-item survey covered four major sections: (a) demographic information, (b) motives for attending pre-game tailgating parties, (c) perceptions on how tailgating will affect the local community, and (d) perceptions how tailgating will affect the University's image. Other than the five demographic-related questions, there were 40 five-point Likert-scale items covered in the other three sections. The Likert scale of 1 to 5 was based on a normal individuals' level of perceptions, which commonly ranges from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

The contents of the questionnaire were reviewed by three faculty members of the surveyed institution's School of Business Administration. A pilot group with 39 students also helped the researchers to test the reliability of the survey questionnaire. The Cronbach Alpha value of all Likert-scale items exceeded .760. The participants of the pilot group followed a test-retest protocol to complete the survey twice under two separated occasions. The two sets of results showed a high level of correlation ($> .90$).

RESULTS

Demographic Information

The gender distributions of male ($n = 168$) and female ($n = 174$) participants were about even (49% vs. 51%). About 85.4% of the participants were Whites (Caucasians). African-Americans were the largest minority group among the non-White participants, which accounted 9.6% of the

www.IJDSM.org

www.IJDSM.net

sample population. About 37% of the participants attended less than five athletic events annually. Nearly 34% were considered as regular attendees who had attended more than 15 games per year. The largest grouping by age was the “less than 30 years old” group (76.3%). Only 13% of the participants were older than age of 40.

The factor analysis identified three major influential factors concerning the participants’ impression toward the pregame tailgating events (See Table 1). The participants’ impression toward the events was influenced by negative consequences (NC), positive consequences (PC), and issues related to the control and image of the institution (C&I). The detailed results of participants’ perception on the control policy for tailgating events were listed in Table 2. In general, the concerns on the controlling policies covered three areas: (1) regulation and control of the environment, (2) drinking related concerns, and (3) financial concerns. According to Table 3, the participants were motivated by two factors, sociability and entertainment (S&E), and escape from daily activities (ESC), for attending the pregame tailgating events. Apparently, the best predictors of overall tailgating enthusiasm were sociability and entertainment, and positive consequences. The result of this regression analysis is displayed in Table 4.

Compared to their older counterpart, the under 30 years-old group had a higher score in positive consequences and a lower score in negative consequences. Older participants’ (> 40 years old) responses about the motives for attending the tailgating events were significantly lower than the responses of the under 30-years-old group. They also had a lower score in sociability & entertainment, escape, and overall tailgating enthusiasm as well.

It is also clear that students’ responses toward the negative consequences are significantly lower than those of faculty and administrators [$F(2, 324) = 26.328, p < .01$]. Speaking of control policy,

www.IJDSM.org

www.IJDSM.net

the faculty had a significantly higher score relating to regulation and control of environment; and administrators had a significantly higher score on financial concerns [$F(2, 338) = 4.442, p < .05$]. Students tended to have a lower rating on those two factors. Students' ratings on factors associated with attending motives and overall tailgating enthusiasm are also higher than those of faculty and administrators.

In terms of gender and racial difference on perceptions toward the pregame tailgating events, two specific findings were identified. White (Caucasian) participants had a lower score in negative consequences than the non-White group, including Hispanics and African Americans (2.15 vs. 2.58, $t = -3.384, p < .01$). In addition, male participants' ratings were higher than those of females on the variable of escape (3.09 > 2.80, $t = 2.312, p < .05$).

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results of this study, the students' focus about issues surrounding tailgating (focus on the potential consequences of tailgating events) is exactly opposite to those of faculty and administrators. Students care about the social and entertainment aspect and are not very concerned about the negative consequences of tailgating. On the other hand, faculty and administrators are more concerned about the policies and environment control during tailgating, but not the positive consequences. This reality makes the implementation of the events more challenging and controversial. The faculty and administrators certainly would like to support activities that are favored by students. However, their worries about the abuse of alcohol and potential liability issues made them hesitate to value the positive consequences of tailgating. Administrators (including athletic staffs) particularly emphasize the financial concerns. Perhaps

www.IJDSM.org

www.IJDSM.net

they sense the extra burdens and the need to generate additional revenues through charging parking fees and leasing tailgating spaces.

Despite the significant differences were found among students', faculty's/staff's, and administrators' perceptions related to tailgating, the overall tailgating enthusiasm for all participants was still strong ($M > 4.00$). This finding seems to imply that there will be enough interest to start tailgating events, if some of the problems related to negative consequences can be minimized or controlled. In fact, with the support from students, faculty, and staff members, the surveyed institution had proposed a brand new tailgating policy in the fall semester of 2010. Under this new policy, the tailgating participants are able to purchase a tailgate spot to conduct grilling and entertaining activities (i.e., cornhole games). However, no alcohol can be consumed in the form of cans or bottles onsite.

The researchers believe that it would be ideal for the athletic department of the surveyed institution to conduct an alcohol education program by seeking for external funds/grants and support from professional organizations. An organization, such as TEAM Coalition, would be an appropriate partner for the institution to start a collective education project.

In the meantime, the institution should also closely monitor the positive consequences that future tailgating events may generate. Strategies for aggressively selling the tailgate spots to the local business/franchises must be developed and utilized. Special packages for season tickets combining with a tailgate spot may be developed and sold. The opportunity for the surveyed institution to prosper from financial benefits through this new tailgating policy is optimistic.

The athletic staff should also actively promote the positive consequences of the tailgating events to less-involved faculty and administrators via various public media (i.e., campus and

www.IJDSM.org

www.IJDSM.net

community newspaper, public radio, and official websites). A change of perspective from some of the older participants (> 45 years old) in favoring the pregame tailgating parties could possibly generate more revenues and moral support to the athletic program.

It is logical to assume that very few people would attend a tailgate party if alcohol is not allowed. However, this assumption has not been scientifically tested with research studies. It would be practical for future researchers to understand the maximum level of alcohol restriction that the fans may tolerate during a tailgating event. It is also evident that the participants' perceptions on alcohol related issues vary based on their racial background. This suggests that one's concern and fear toward the alcohol abuse may be culturally influenced. Administrators and sport marketers may need to be sensitive about how certain groups react to a specific tailgating policy.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR SPORT MARKETERS

The researchers believe that the results of this study provide several practical tips to help an athletic department or a sport organization to operate a safe yet entertaining tailgating event. To some extent, tailgating and alcohol abuse have been viewed as synonymous, but indeed, they are separate issues. The only link between those two terms is that alcohol may be consumed during the tailgating events. Many professional sport games, such as basketball, baseball, and hockey do not have tailgating but they do serve alcohol beverages (i.e., beer) in the stadium or arenas. The important key is to manage disorderly conduct and rowdiness and minimize drunk driving effectively. Professional football teams like the New York Jets and Giants have a clear policy to handle misconduct in the stadium due to excessive drinking (New York Giants, 2008). If such measures are implemented and enforced, the damage of alcohol-induced incidents to society and

www.IJDSM.org

www.IJDSM.net

the school can be minimal. In the researchers' opinion, denying the tailgating events completely is costing more than the benefits that those events can bring.

For any organization that wishes to start a brand-new tailgating event, here are some of the practical strategies proposed by other sport organizations and supported by the participants of this study. The surveyed institution actually adopted the following these strategies to shape its newly created tailgating policies. Here are the highlights of those policies.

- (1) Targeting certain clients and alumni and selling tailgate spaces prior to the beginning of the football season;
- (2) Establishing an alcohol education program;
- (3) Monitoring a designated tailgating zone (i.e., requiring participants to present ID) and issuing wristbands to those who are 21 and older;
- (4) Disallowing drinking out of cans and glass bottles;
- (5) Having the police officers patrol the designated area regularly; and
- (6) Limiting tailgating hours
- (7) Weighing the financial implications (i.e., fans may not like to pay expensive fees; and the cost for hiring extra manpower to maintain a safe environment can be unexpectedly high).

REFERENCES

- Adams, B. (2006). Seven reasons why UGA is the greatest school in the state. *Atlanta*, 46(7), 44.
- Allison, C. (2005). *Tailgating: An American tradition*. Retrieved April 19, 2010 from http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/10253/tailgating_an_american_tradition.html?cat=25
- Appalachian State University (2008). *Appalachian State University football tailgating policy*. Retrieved June 1, 2009 from <http://www.alumni.appstate.edu/PDFs/tailgatepolicy.pdf>
- Armes, A. (2005). Score big with safe tailgating. *Family Safety & Health*, 64(3), 14-17.
- Bormann, C., & M. Stone (2001). *The effects of eliminating alcohol in a college stadium: The Folsom Field beer Ban*. *Journal of American College Health*, 50(2), 81-8.
- Chen, S., Salazar, W., & Fitzgerald, L. (2009). Factors affecting collegiate sports season-ticket holders' satisfaction and renewal intention. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 80(Suppl. 1), A-107.
- Dickinson, C. (2004). Syracuse Sports Corp., CVB drive to bring in more sporting events. *Business Journal*, 18(25), 4.
- Dixon, Anthony. W (2009). *Estimating the private consumption benefits derived from the college football game experience*. Unpublished dissertation, Clemson University.
- Drenten, J. Peters, C. Okleshen, L. Thomas, & Hollenbeck, C. R. (2009). Not just a party in the parking lot: An exploratory investigation of the motives underlying the ritual commitment of football tailgaters. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 18(2), 92-106.
- Eastern Michigan University (2008a). *Eagle's landing fan zone*. Retrieved August 20, 2009 from <http://www.emueagles.com/sports/2008/4/14/EaglesLanding08.aspx?id=334>
- Eastern Michigan University (2008b). *Eagle's landing tailgates*. Retrieved May 19, 2009 from <http://www.emich.edu/homecoming/documents/2008TailgateFormPolicy.pdf>
- Flynn, K. Lenkowitz, E., & M. Ward, Elizabeth, M. (n.d.). Tailgating 101. Retrieved March 13, 2010 from http://www.mensfitness.com/sports_and_recreation/outdoor_recreation/37
- Glassman, T., Werch, C., Jobli, E., & Bian, H. (2007). Alcohol-related fan behavior on college football game day. *Journal of American College Health*, 56(3), 255-260.
- James, J., Breezeel, G. S., & Ross, S. (2001). A two-stage study of the reasons to begin and continue tailgating. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 10(4), 212-222.
- Laverie, D., & Arnett, D. (2000). Factors affecting fan attendance: The influence of identify salience and satisfaction. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 32, 225-246.
- McCarthy, M. (2009). NFL's crackdown on fan conduct gets tough. *USA Today*. Retrieved April 6, 2010 from http://www.usatoday.com/NEWS/usaedition/2009-11-19-1Anflfans19_CV_U.htm?csp=34
- McDonald, M., Milne, G., & Hong, J. (2002). Motivational factors for evaluating sport spectator and participants markets. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 11(2), 100-113.
- Oster-Aaland, L., & Neighbors, C. (2007). The impact of a tailgating policy on students' drinking behavior and perceptions. *Journal of American College Health*, 56(3), 281-284.
- National Football League (2009). *NFL teams implement fan code of conduct*. Retrieved April 4, 2010 from <http://www.nfl.com/news/story?id=09000d5d809c28f9&template=without-video&confirm=true>
- New York Giants (2008). *Updated stadium alcohol policy for 2008*. Retrieved February 6, 2010

www.IJDSM.org

www.IJDSM.net

- from http://www.giants.com/news/headlines/story.asp?story_id=28168
- Swanson, S., Gwinner, K., Larson, B. V., & Janda, S. (2003). Motivations of college student game attendance and word-of-mouth behavior: The impact of gender differences. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 12(3), 151-161.
- Tailgate Station (2007). *Tailgate station testimonials*. Retrieved May 21, 2009 from <http://www.tailgatestation.net/testimonials.cfm>
- University of Massachusetts (2008). *UMass releases football tailgating policy for 2008*. Retrieved July 31, 2009 from <http://www.umassathletics.com/sports/m-footbl/spec-rel/081507aaa.html>
- University of West Georgia (u.d.). *Tailgating policies and procedures*. Retrieved July 19, 2009 from http://www.westga.edu/alcohol/index_10646.php
- University of Wisconsin Stout (2009). *Football tailgating policies*. Retrieved August 17, 2009 from http://athletics.uwstout.edu/sports/2009/8/13/FB_0813094947.aspx?tab=footballtailgatingpolicies
- Unknown. (2010). Eco-friendly tailgating. *Men's Fitness*, 26(3), 52.
- USA Today (2009a). *How NFL clubs' tailgating hours differ*. Retrieved April 2, 2010 from http://www.usatoday.com/NEWS/usaedition/2009-11-19-1Anflfans19_VA_U.htm?csp=34
- USA Today (2009b). *No fun league' strikes again*. Retrieved April 5, 2010 from http://www.usatoday.com/NEWS/usaedition/2009-11-23-letters23_ST2_U.htm?csp=34
- Wann, D. (2006). Understanding the positive social psychological benefits of sport team identification: The team identification-social psychological health model. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 10 (4), 272-296.
- Wann, D., Grieve, F., Zapalac, R., & Pease, D. (2008). Motivational profiles of sport fans of different sports. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 17(1), 6-19.
- Williams, B. (n.d.). *NCAA sporting events*. Retrieved March 1, 2010 from <http://ccsap.wsu.edu/default.asp?PageID=3352>
- Woodyard, C., & Hallan, J. (2010). Differences in college student typical drinking and celebration drinking. *Journal of American College Health*, 58(6), 533-538.
- Wells, D. E., Southall, R., & Peng, H. W. (2000). Analysis of factors related to attendance at Division-II football games. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 9(4), 203-210.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers would like to thank the following people for helping collect data: Ashley McNabb, Matthew Williams, Evan Sawyer, & Parris Brantley

Tables and Figures**Table 1**

Impression toward the pregame tailgate events (Loading = .61; Cronbach's α = .536)

Factor	Score
Negative consequences	2.21
Positive consequences	4.38
Issues related to control and image of the institution	3.50

Table 2

Perceptions on the control policy of the pregame tailgating event (Loading = .57; Cronbach's Alpha = .793)

Factor	Score
Regulation and control of the environment	3.65
Drinking related concerns	2.98
Financial concerns	2.73

Table 3

Motives for attending the pregame tailgating events (Loading = .70; Cronbach's α = .88)

Factor	Score
Sociability and entertainment	4.16
Escape from daily activities	2.94

Table 4

Regression analysis on the predictor of overall tailgating enthusiasm

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	1.697	.145	11.664*

	Sociability and entertainment	.663	.034	.751	19.666*
2	(Constant)	.672	.187		3.602*
	Sociability and entertainment	.454	.041	.514	11.125*
	Positive consequences	.431	.055	.361	7.822*
3	(Constant)	1.629	.266		6.114*
	Sociability and entertainment	.417	.040	.472	10.420*
	Positive consequences	.351	.056	.294	6.313*
	Negative consequences	-.207	.042	-.191	-4.868*

* $p < .01$