

Summary

The FCCP student team developed a strategy for Duke Athletics to increase student engagement and encourage consistent attendance at football games.

Project Snapshot

Focus: Marketing Strategy

Client: Duke Athletics

Industry: Sports and Entertainment

Type: University

HQ: Durham, NC, USA

Challenge

Duke University Athletics in Durham, North Carolina features 21 varsity teams competing at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I level and in the Atlantic Coast (ACC) conference. In 2021, Duke's football stadium, Wallace Wade Stadium, rarely filled half its seats for games, and attendance was declining after disruptions from COVID-19.

Duke Athletics asked their FCCP student team to understand the causes of these significant declines and develop strategies to consistently increase attendance into the 2022 season and beyond.

Approach

Since Duke Athletics has been a long-term FCCP client partner, students were able to begin their research by reviewing data from previous FCCP projects and provide a follow-up analysis on previous teams' recommendations. Next, the project team distributed a survey to undergraduate and graduate students to gauge brand perception and behavior, along with conducting more qualitative interviews with student leaders, community leaders, Duke Athletics staff members, and former football players.

Students also tabulated the historical attendance data of Duke football and explored attendance trends at comparable institutions inside and outside of the ACC to analyze possible causes that led to high variations in attendance. The team also conducted research with peer institutions to distill best practices for engaging local communities in football games.

“Within a week of the final presentation, we were able to implement one of the key recommendations that the team made regarding a new tailgate space for football games. This had been previously discussed internally, but being able to hear it from a third party was what put it over the top.”

Chris Alston, Executive Director of Marketing, Duke Athletics

Recommendation



The team synthesized findings and ranked recommendations using criteria that included difficulty of implementation, cost, and projected impact on attendance. The team recommended strategies for engaging influential student leaders to rally others to attend home games and tailgates.

Students also recommended event design tactics for improving tailgates and making it a more vibrant social experience, since a majority of survey respondents shared that they had never attended a tailgate.

The FCCP team also discovered another valuable data point: 97 percent of survey respondents were unaware of the main marketing communication channel Duke Athletics Football uses to engage students. Students offered strategies for using alternative marketing channels to better reach students.

Lastly, the team recommended an approach to gather anonymous demographic information on football game attendees in order to segment their marketing efforts for more targeted promotion and engagement. Read more about how Duke Athletics implemented their football engagement strategy in the [Duke Chronicle](#).



The Duke Athletics Daytime MBA team: Nick Olindo '23, Stefan Smith '23, Lucas Fordham '23, and Maya Dennis '23. Not pictured: Erik Francisco '23.

“The team was very thorough and engaged through the entire project. They asked great questions and came back with insightful feedback. Overall, I thought they worked extremely well together and collaborated with our team in an efficient manner.”

Chris Alston, Executive Director of Marketing, Duke Athletics

About FCCP

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