

# **Shifting Priorities: The Impact of Name, Image, and Likeness on College Football Recruitment**

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On my honor as a University Student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment as defined by the Honor Guidelines for Thesis-Related Assignments

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## **Transforming College Athletics**

College athletics have long been a cornerstone of American sports culture and are enjoyed for their blend of competition and amateurism. For athletes, coaches, and fans alike, college athletics has served as a platform for growth and achievement, with recruiting serving as its foundation. However, the recent implementation of Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) policies in July 2021 has fundamentally altered the landscape of college athletics (Shollenberger, 2024). In the first year of NIL, 76% of college athletes secured NIL deals, with 49.9% of them being football athletes (Dosh, 2022). These deals collectively generated \$917 million in revenue, with transaction values rising by 80% from the first month to the twelfth month (Dosh, 2022). While these policies allow athletes to monetize their personal brands, they also introduce challenges that have reshaped recruiting dynamics.

The transformative effects of NIL have raised concerns about the priorities of both high school recruits and transfer recruits. Athletes now prioritize programs offering financial opportunities and playing time over programs emphasizing developmental potential or long-term loyalty (Shollenberger, 2024). This shift from a relationship-based recruiting model to a more transactional one has diverted from the traditional values that define the college athletics experience. National Football League (NFL) agent Jesse Foreman observes, “NIL collectives have changed the recruiting process for athletes into a business much more than a development for the athletes” (Foreman, 2025). This sentiment highlights an effect that NIL has introduced to recruiting in college athletics.

The recent retirement of Tony Bennett, head coach of the University of Virginia’s (UVA) men’s basketball team, further underscores the need for addressing these issues. Known for his dedication to player development and the integrity of the game, Bennett’s departure has been

linked to the rise of commercialism in college athletics. In his retirement speech, Bennett stated, “I’m no longer the best coach to lead this program in this current environment” (Newton, 2024). Bennett also added, “It’s right for players, student-athletes, to receive revenue. Please don’t mistake me, I do. I think it is. But the game and college athletics are not in a healthy spot. It’s not, and there needs to be change” (Newton, 2024). Bennett’s remarks showcase the systemic challenges introduced by NIL, including concerns about its impact on recruiting and the college athletics model. He also addressed areas for reform by stating, “It’s going to be closer to a professional model, where there’s got to be collective bargaining. There has to be a restriction on the salary pool that teams can spend. There has to be transfer regulations and restrictions. There has to be some limit on the agent involvement to these young guys” (Newton, 2024). His perspective and retirement not only highlight the challenges introduced by NIL but also serve as a call to action for addressing the issues with NIL.

This research paper argues that NIL policies have transformed the recruiting landscape in college football, shifting athlete priorities from developmental potential and loyalty to financial incentives and playing time (Shollenberger, 2024). By examining the UVA football program and broader trends across other college football programs, this paper analyzes how NIL policies have reshaped recruiting practices and assesses their implications for the future of college athletics.

### **Amateurism to Opportunity: The Evolution of NIL and Its Challenges**

NIL refers to the rights of college athletes to profit from their personal brand through endorsements, sponsorships, or social media promotions (Sinatra & Williams, 2023). These policies allow student-athletes to receive compensation for the use of their identity while

maintaining their eligibility to compete in collegiate athletics. For example, before the implementation of NIL, fans could buy jerseys featuring an athlete's number but not their name. With NIL, athletes can now monetize their identities by allowing fans to buy jerseys that display their name and number. NIL has introduced a new dynamic to college athletics, empowering athletes to capitalize on their marketability while raising questions about its broader implications for recruiting, competition, and the overall structure of college athletics.

The road to NIL began in 2019 when California passed a law to become the first state to allow college athletes to get paid (Tucker, 2022). This landmark decision encouraged other states to pass similar laws and policies, ultimately pressuring the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) to address the issue. In 2021, the NCAA went to the U.S. Supreme Court over its limitations on education related benefits for college athletes. The court's unanimous ruling stated that the NCAA could not impose such restrictions, with Justice Brett Kavanaugh noting, "The NCAA is not above the law" (Tucker, 2022). Following the ruling, the NCAA implemented an interim NIL policy to provide initial guidelines for athletes and colleges while more concrete policies were being developed.

Through 2022 and 2023, the NCAA revised the NIL policies to address emerging concerns, such as ensuring fair recruiting practices and reducing disparities amongst colleges. In 2024, NIL policies took a significant turn with the class action lawsuit *House v. NCAA*. This case introduced two major components: backwards looking compensation for athletes dating back to 2016, and a forward-looking revenue sharing system (Bonani, 2024). If approved in April 2025, the revenue sharing settlement will allow Division I (D1) schools to allocate funds directly to the athletes. Power Five schools, like UVA, are expected to distribute \$20 million annually or 22% of their annual athletic revenue (Bonani, 2024). Over the next decade, this figure is anticipated to

grow to \$33 million annually, reflecting the increasing commercialization of college athletics (Bonani, 2024).

The introduction of NIL policies has altered the recruiting landscape in college athletics. Before NIL, recruiting was based on factors such as program success, coaching staff, facilities and educational opportunities with scholarships serving as financial incentives. With NIL, financial incentives and playing time have replaced traditional priorities, challenging the amateurism model that defined college athletics. As NIL opportunities have become a consideration for athletes, recruiting, described as the lifeblood of a program's success, has altered athletes decision-making processes (Bilas, 2022). Additionally, the rise of NIL collectives has played a significant role in this transformation. These organizations, while technically unaffiliated with schools, provide athletes with NIL opportunities, creating a new avenue for programs to recruit top athletes. Though the NCAA guidelines prohibit collectives from directly influencing recruiting, enforcing these guidelines has proven nearly impossible, allowing NIL collectives to become an actual recruiting tool (Bilas, 2022). Justin Speros cites concerns with NIL collectives, stating, "Certain schools are going to build up an NIL war chest and other schools aren't going to have the same luxury to do that" (Speros, 2025). He further adds, "Most collectives are glorified money laundering operations" (Speros, 2025). This perspective provides insight into the disparities in NIL, and how collectives are introducing imbalances across colleges. As a result, NIL collectives raise new questions regarding ethical and regulatory challenges in college athletics.

This shift has introduced a recruiting competition between athletic programs. Previously, programs relied on building strong relationships with recruits, emphasizing player development and team culture as selling points. Now, financial incentives through NIL have become a

dominant factor in recruiting decisions, shifting the balance of power towards schools with strong donor and collective support. Colleges with well-funded and supported NIL collectives stand to gain a significant advantage, while smaller colleges who are at a financial disadvantage are unable to compete for recruits. This presents disparities between large and small college athletics programs. As the NCAA struggles to regulate these developments, the possibility of schools offering contracts to athletes further blurs the line between amateur sports and professional sports (Bilas, 2022). NIL has brought a lasting impact to recruiting, showcasing both its opportunities and challenges in preserving the integrity and amateurism of college athletics. By framing NIL within the recruiting context, this analysis explores how these policies are reshaping values and dynamics of college athletics.

### **Social Construction of Technology: Understanding NIL's Impact**

Understanding the societal and ethical effects of NIL policies is crucial to comprehending the full impact NIL has on college recruiting. To analyze these effects, the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) framework, developed by Trevor Pinch and Wiebe Bijker, will be applied. SCOT argues that technological development is not a linear or purely scientific process but is instead shaped by the interactions and interpretations of various social groups and stakeholders (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). This framework emphasizes that the trajectory of a technology or policy is contingent upon social, economic, cultural, and political factors (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999).

At the core of SCOT rests the concept of interpretive flexibility, which highlights how different stakeholders and social groups interpret technologies or policies based on their values

and interests. This multidirectional model is particularly useful in analyzing the introduction of NIL policies in college athletics, where various stakeholders interact to shape the policy's interpretation and impact. SCOT provides two key analytical components: interpretive flexibility and closure/stabilization.

Interpretive flexibility suggests that a single technology or policy can have multiple meanings and applications depending on the perspectives of stakeholders and social groups (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). In the case of NIL, stakeholders include universities, coaches, athletes, collectives, and fans. Each relevant social group views NIL through a different lens, resulting in diverse interpretations of its impact. For example, athletes may view NIL as a pathway to financial freedom, while universities might focus on the challenges it creates in maintaining fair recruiting practices (Owens, Rennhoff & Roach, 2024). Collectives, on the other hand, may see NIL as an opportunity to collaborate with top talent and expand their marketing reach. These stakeholders and social groups play a vital role in shaping the development of NIL policies.

Closure and stabilization occur when a dominant interpretation emerges, resolving conflicts among stakeholders and solidifying the technology or policy within society (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). In the context of NIL, many stakeholders and social groups have varying opinions. Current debates include proposals for revenue sharing, regulations on collectives, salary caps, and restrictions on agent involvement (Newton, 2024; Orr, 2022). However, with ongoing discussions about commercializing college athletics further through revenue sharing, NIL policy remains in a constantly changing environment.

An example of the SCOT framework being applied is the development of the bicycle, as explored by Pinch and Bijker. In its early stages, the bicycle's design was subject to various interpretations by different social groups and stakeholders. For instance, while some viewed it as

a practical tool for transportation, others saw it as a recreational racing device for the wealthy (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). Stakeholders such as manufacturers, safety advocates, and users debated features like wheel size, braking systems, and stability, leading to a multidirectional model of the bicycle (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). Over time, as certain designs gained a widespread interpretation, the bicycle achieved closure and stabilization as a standard technology. This example illustrates how social and cultural forces shape technological development, offering parallel insights to the ongoing development of NIL policies in college athletics.

The SCOT framework provides a structured way to analyze how NIL policies are reshaping college athletics, particularly in recruitment. Interpretive flexibility is evident in how stakeholders engage with NIL, as each social group and stakeholder brings different perspectives and interpretations. This analysis will explore those perspectives from key stakeholders and assess the effects of NIL on recruitment. Beyond recruitment, NIL's impact extends to broader social and ethical issues in college athletics. Questions surrounding fairness arise as top talent in revenue-generating sports secure lucrative deals, while athletes in less visible sports may struggle to benefit. Additionally, NIL has increasingly resembled a professional sports model, which raises concerns about the future of the college athletics model. SCOT's emphasis on interpretive flexibility allows for the analysis of these dynamics and captures the ways stakeholders interpret and reshape NIL policies.

As NIL policies continue to evolve, the SCOT framework provides a lens to understand their development and impact on recruiting. The interpretations among stakeholders and social groups shape the development of NIL policies in college athletics. Whether the policies will achieve closure and stabilization depends on how the stakeholders and social groups adapt to the rapidly changing NIL environment. By framing NIL through the SCOT framework, this research



seeks to uncover how its implementation has influenced recruiting in college football and what it reveals about the broader intersection of policy, technology, and society.

**Researching NIL’s Influence on Recruiting**

NIL has rapidly become a defining factor in college athletics, not only transforming the field as a whole, but also altering the recruiting landscape. While schools adapt to this reality, the impact on recruiting priorities and practices continues to evolve (Anaba, 2025; Owens, Rennhoff & Roach, 2024). As NIL opportunities increasingly influence the decisions of high school recruits and college transfers, this research seeks to address the following question: How has NIL transformed recruiting priorities and practices in college athletics, and what are the broader implications for the future of college athletics?

To explore this question, interviews were conducted with key officials within the UVA football program. This qualitative approach examines how NIL has shaped recruiting strategies and how stakeholders interpret these impacts. The interviews focused on NIL’s role in recruiting decisions, the challenges it poses, and how UVA has adapted to these shifts. The interview questions for each interviewee are provided in Appendices A, B, and C; the interviewees and their roles at UVA are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** NIL Interviewees and Roles

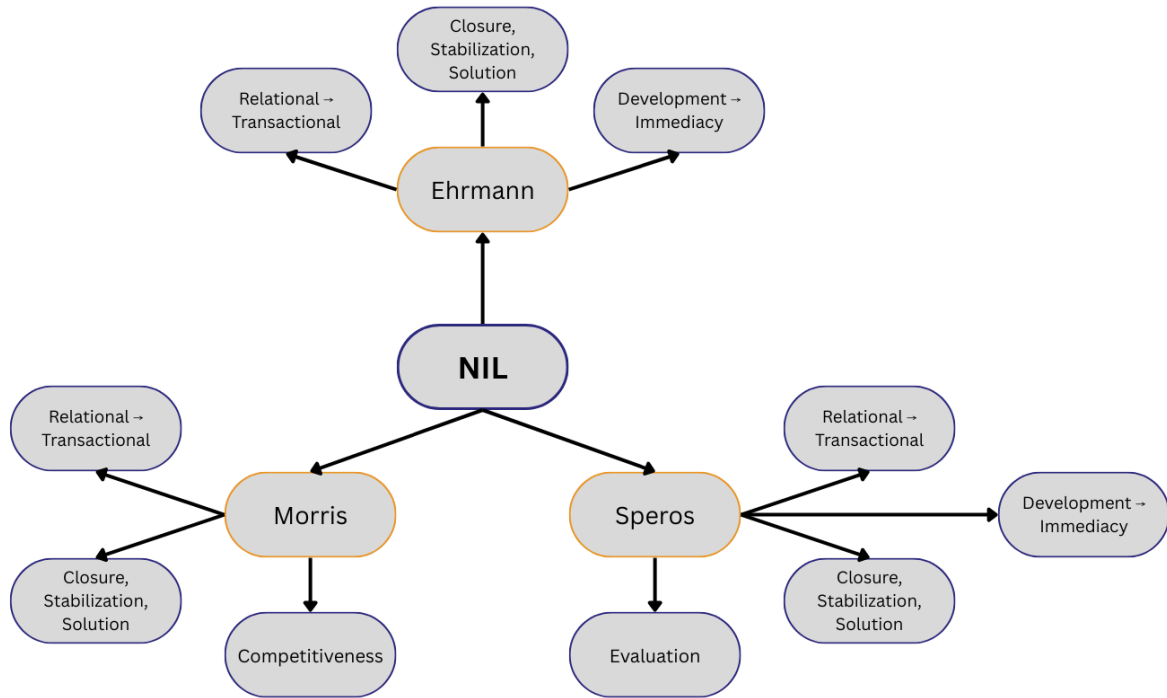
Interviewee	Title	Responsibilities
Elizabeth Ehrmann	Director of Football Operations	Oversees NCAA compliance and NIL regulations.
Lindsey Morris	Assistant Athletic Director for Compliance	Manages logistics, staffing, and scheduling.
Justin Speros	Director of Recruiting (Football)	Leads scouting and recruitment of all recruits.

By synthesizing these interviews, the analysis utilizes the SCOT framework to examine the stakeholders' interpretations of NIL and its impact on recruiting. Specifically, it assesses whether NIL has reached a point of closure and stabilization by identifying a shared interpretation among stakeholders (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). Through thematic analysis of the interview responses, this research explores the evolving dynamics of recruiting in college football and offers insights into how NIL will shape future recruiting practices.

## **Results**

The implementation of NIL has fundamentally altered recruiting dynamics in college football, shifting the focus from long-term player development and program loyalty to immediate financial incentives and playing time. "It's truly the wild, wild west right now in the world of NIL," remarked Justin Speros (Speros, 2025). This statement encapsulates the current turbulence within college athletics. Interviews reveal that recruiting has transitioned from a relationship-driven process to a more transactional approach, where financial opportunities and playing time often outweigh traditional recruiting factors such as relationships and development. All interviewees expressed concern over the instability of the current NIL landscape, citing a lack of regulation and advocating for solutions such as revenue sharing and collective bargaining, a finding identified in other research (Baker et al., 2023; Wohlwend, 2024). These insights demonstrate how NIL has reshaped recruiting practices and highlight its broader implications for the future of college athletics. Figure 1 illustrates the NIL concept map, which summarizes the focal points of NIL and the key themes identified in the interviews.

**Figure 1.** NIL Concept Map



### ***Relational to Transactional Recruiting***

Since the introduction of NIL, Elizabeth Ehrmann has noticed a fundamental shift in the recruiting process from a relationship-driven model to a transactional one. Reflecting on pre-NIL recruiting, she explains, “The recruiting process was very much about the coach’s relationship with the family, with the students, with the teachers, and with their high school coaches” (Ehrmann, 2025). This relational approach focused on building trust, connection, and long-term relationships with recruits. However, NIL has transformed recruiting into a transactional process with financial incentives and playing time being negotiated. She elaborates, “It was much more

about relationships and relationship building,” but now, “It’s become a lot more transactional. It’s very much a dollar figure now” (Ehrmann, 2025). Recruits are now asking, “How much am I going to make, and will I be a starter” (Ehrmann, 2025)? From a SCOT perspective, this shift reflects the interpretive flexibility of NIL, where different stakeholders and social groups assign different meanings to NIL’s role in recruiting. For athletes, NIL represents financial empowerment, while for coaches it disrupts the traditional relationship building model. This transformation from relational to transactional motivates a change in priorities, where immediate financial gains and playing time take precedence over long-term development and personal connections.

Like Ehrmann, Lindsey Morris has also observed the recruiting process shift from a relational approach to a transactional approach. “A lot of coaches are like, ‘I don’t want to talk to a kids’ agent. I got into football to get to know the kid and their mom and their dad,’” Morris explains (Morris, 2025). She notes that agents now act as intermediaries, driving financial negotiations and shaping recruiting decisions. Morris adds, “Basically, you have agents now and the agents are representing the players” (Morris, 2025). As a result, recruiting conversations now center around money and playing time, rather than relationships. Recruits are asking, “How much can you offer me? How much time do I get to spend with NIL, how much time do I get to be on the field” (Morris, 2025)? The agents are securing the deals for the recruits and dictating the terms of those deals. Morris points out, “Agents are telling us we’re not even going to go on a visit unless you all can offer us this amount of money” (Morris, 2025). This transactional shift has altered the priorities of recruits. “It used to be football and academics, and then there wasn’t a money aspect,” now, “It’s football and money, and then academics,” Morris adds (Morris, 2025). This demonstrates the multidirectional model within SCOT, where different groups

interpret NIL in distinct ways. Coaches resist the involvement of agents because it disrupts their established role to build relationships, while players embrace it to secure financial freedom. The broader impact of NIL highlights how recruits and programs approach the different landscape in recruiting.

Justin Speros has also observed a shift from relational to transactional recruiting due to NIL and agent involvement. “A lot more agent involvement,” Speros states, indicating a fundamental change in the recruiting process (Speros, 2025). He explains, “A majority of them (recruits) have agent representation to help them manage their NIL deals” (Speros, 2025). As a result, direct conversations with recruits are being replaced by negotiations with agents. “When you’re recruiting a transfer, you’re going to the agent as opposed to the kid himself,” he adds, showcasing the transactional nature of the recruiting process (Speros, 2025). This highlights SCOT’s emphasis on stakeholder negotiations, where the growing presence of agents represents a reconfiguration of power dynamics in recruiting. He further elaborates by stating, “It’s more transactional when it comes to transfer recruiting,” indicating that there is still a relational aspect with high school recruits (Speros, 2025). However, NIL has become a universal factor in decision making, with Speros explaining, “Maybe 25% of the kids that would come on an official visit (in 2022) would ask about it (NIL). Now you know with certainty whether high school or transfers, everyone’s going to ask about NIL” (Speros, 2025). This demonstrates how NIL has altered recruits’ priorities, with financial opportunities taking center stage over traditional relationships.

### ***Long-Term Development to Immediacy***

Before NIL, college athletics focused on holistic development of student-athletes, including their education, personal growth, and athletic growth. Now, however, the emphasis has shifted towards immediacy over development. Ehrmann notes that “it’s less developmental,” indicating that the traditional focus of development has been overshadowed by the pursuit of immediate benefits (Ehrmann, 2025). She explains, with NIL, “The development is less important than the immediacy,” showcasing how recruits prioritize short-term financial benefits and immediate playing time over their development (Ehrmann, 2025). Ehrmann observes the transition is driven by the desire of recruits seeking instant gratification: “I want to be the starter, I want to go in now, I want to be *the* person” (Ehrmann, 2025). This demonstrates a broader trend in recruits’ priorities and how NIL’s technological and policy shifts have been socially constructed to prioritize short-term immediacy over traditional long-term development.

Like Ehrmann, Speros has noticed that playing time and immediacy has become top priorities in recruits’ decision-making processes, stating, “That’s going to be the first question they want answered: What does the depth chart look like? Am I going to have an opportunity to come in here and play” (Speros, 2025)? This desire for immediate playing opportunities outweighs long-term development. Speros further explains, “Playing time. That’s always going to be the number one thing,” indicating that immediacy is an important aspect in the recruiting process (Speros, 2025). While playing time has always been a factor, NIL and the transfer portal have heightened the immediacy of recruits’ demands. He also states, “Playing time is massive. That’s probably the number one reason for transfers,” illustrating how experienced players are seeking guaranteed roles rather than developmental opportunities (Speros, 2025). This shift

towards immediacy has diminished the emphasis on long-term growth and development in college athletics.

### ***Secondary Recruiting Factors***

While the recruiting process has transitioned to a more transactional process, Morris acknowledges that NIL has helped UVA compete at a higher level. “It’s helped us in recruiting simply because it’s helped us be competitive,” she explains (Morris, 2025). NIL has enabled UVA to compete with top programs and attract high-caliber recruits. This suggests institutions like UVA are reshaping their interpretation of NIL to adapt and survive in the ever-changing recruiting landscape. Morris also states, “NILs helped us remain competitive, and so people just looking at UVA as like they’re only known for academics, but they’re also known for being able to compete on and off the field” (Morris, 2025). This change in perception is vital for UVA in attracting top talent who value both academic and athletic excellence. However, she warns that the focus on NIL could marginalize high school recruits. “The challenge is the high school kid will get forgotten about. It’s easier to go grab a transfer kid that’s already got college experience instead of a high school kid,” Morris notes (Morris, 2025). This reveals a frame shift in recruiting, where NIL and the transfer portal prioritize immediate talent acquisition over long-term development.

As the ability to compete grows, NIL has also added a new dimension to how recruits evaluate programs and their personal worth. Speros notes that NIL adds another layer to the recruiting process, stating, “NIL is kind of another bucket that they’re evaluating” (Speros, 2025). Beyond financial opportunities, recruits use NIL offers as a measure of their perceived

value within a program. He states, “They’re not only curious for what the opportunity looks like financially, but they’re equating. They’re equating the number with value in the organization” (Speros, 2025). This means that recruits assess their importance to a program based on their NIL opportunities. Speros mentions, “Do they view me as a contributor, do they view me as one of the big pieces of their class, or am I just an afterthought” (Speros, 2025)? This demonstrates how NIL has introduced a multidirectional model of value assessment, where recruits, programs, and collectives each interpret NIL deals differently. For recruits, NIL serves as a measure of their worth within a program. For coaches, it reflects their ability to attract talent. For collectives, it determines financial priorities in a competitive landscape. These competing interpretations create complexity in the recruiting process, reinforcing SCOT’s view that technological and policy shifts are shaped by varying priorities of different stakeholders.

### ***Closure and Stabilization***

Despite the challenges NIL presents, Ehrmann acknowledges its benefits, stating, “students have more opportunities than they wouldn’t otherwise have” (Ehrmann, 2025). However, she emphasizes that NIL has not yet reached a point of closure and stabilization. Ehrmann describes NIL as “an evolving process” where “nothing changes in a day” (Ehrmann, 2025). She believes achieving complete stability and closure is unlikely, explaining, “An immediate effect and perfect thing is never going to happen” (Ehrmann, 2025). Still, she remains optimistic that “eventually things will flatten out. It takes time” (Ehrmann, 2025). To enhance stability, Ehrmann advocates for revenue sharing, suggesting it would allow colleges to regain some control and help “level the playing field,” leading to a more equitable, sustainable, and balanced NIL landscape (Ehrmann, 2025) (Wohlwend, 2024). According to Ehrmann and SCOT,



NIL remains in a state of interpretive flexibility, where stakeholders are continuing to negotiate its purpose and function within college athletics. The continuous debate among stakeholders introduces an ongoing discourse preventing NIL from reaching stabilization. Ehrmann's call for revenue sharing reflects an attempt to push NIL towards a more structured, stable, and accepted system.

Morris views NIL as a major financial beneficial for players, stating, "The NIL impact has helped our players. The athlete is finally able to have dollars in their pockets" (Morris, 2025). The extent of these financial opportunities is questioned by Morris, adding, "They're able to have money, I just don't know if they need that much" (Morris, 2025). While Morris understands the benefits introduced from NIL, she also asserts that the state of NIL lacks stability. When asked whether NIL has reached a point of closure and stabilization, she responded, "No" (Morris, 2025). She notices ongoing disagreements among stakeholders, stating, "The ACC coaches just had a meeting, and I can tell you probably out of the 17 schools, maybe seven agree with the current state of NIL. The rest of them think that there should be NIL, but there should be change in some form or capacity" (Morris, 2025). Even within the UVA's football program, Morris notes that perspectives vary stating, "I mean, our staff don't even agree with the NIL perspective on how it should be done" (Morris, 2025). The disparities among stakeholders highlight NIL's ongoing interpretive flexibility, where differing views prevent stabilization. According to SCOT, NIL reaches closure and stabilization when stakeholders converge on a common interpretation. The current disagreements suggest that NIL remains in a fluid, non-stable state, requiring reform.

While NIL has benefits, Speros believes it has largely turned into a pay-for-play operation in need of reform. "It's being packaged as NIL, name, image, likeness, dollars where players are supposed to be earning money for doing some sort of service. It really quickly turned

into a pay-for-play type operation where teams and coaches found loopholes,” he states (Speros, 2025). This reveals the interpretive flexibility of NIL, where its intended purpose as an economic and marketing tool for athletes has been reconstructed by stakeholders to serve as an unregulated, professional sports-like pay-for-play system. He acknowledges that “when it’s done right it’s a really good thing,” but warns, “if it is not done properly, it can be dangerous” (Speros, 2025). Due to the lack of regulations, Speros argues that NIL is in an unstable state. He emphasizes, “Until we have this House settlement thing figured out and then a CBA, there’s going to be imbalances across the board” (Speros, 2025). Speros calls for increased regulation, asserting, “There needs to be more parameters,” and anticipates that “after the House settlement case, it will reach a more stable situation with NIL, because it’s not sustainable and it’s in an unhealthy place” (Speros, 2025). This signals an effort to move NIL towards closure and stabilization, as stakeholders push for regulatory and policy changes to define an accepted purpose and function in college athletics. Like Speros mentioned, he advocates for the implementation of revenue sharing and collective bargaining (Wohlwend, 2024) (Baker et al., 2023). He states, “Ultimately, I think what we need to get to is collective bargaining,” and notes, “Until we have a CBA there’s going to be just massive inequities across the board” (Speros, 2025). Additionally, he stresses the need to “eliminate any pay-for-play from NIL and truly just make it solely be fair market deals, like they have to be fair” (Speros, 2025). These proposed reforms aim to bring stability and fairness to the NIL landscape.

## **Discussion**

The research conducted on the impact of NIL in college recruiting offers a nuanced perspective on how these policies have transformed recruiting dynamics. Through the SCOT

framework, this study illustrates the interactions between key stakeholders and how these interactions have reshaped the recruiting landscape. The shift from relational to transactional recruiting, the focus on immediacy over long-term development, and concerns about competitiveness and fairness align with broader theories of technological and policy-driven change. Within SCOT, NIL represents an evolving artifact where interpretive flexibility is evident in how stakeholders view it. Some see NIL as an opportunity for empowerment and equity, while others view it as a disruption to traditional recruiting norms. Similar cases, such as the introduction of free agency in professional sports, reveal comparable patterns of stakeholder influence, demonstrating the importance of social context in shaping technological change (Szymanski, 2006).

One limitation of this research is its reliance on qualitative interviews, while valuable, reflect individual perspectives rather than comprehensive trends in recruiting dynamics. Additionally, due to the rapid evolution of NIL, this study may not capture the long-term implications with certainty. Another key limitation is that this research focused exclusively on UVA football, which may not fully represent other programs with larger NIL collectives or different perspectives on NIL. Furthermore, this study did not incorporate perspectives from student athletes or NIL collectives, both of whom play critical roles in shaping NIL. Future research should expand to other universities and sports, include quantitative data, and analyze NIL's broader impact on recruiting practices and competitive balance. A more detailed SCOT analysis could further clarify how NIL's stabilization process is being influenced by the conflicting perspectives, as various stakeholders push for different interpretations.

Examining perspectives across different programs would provide a more holistic understanding of NIL's impact. Public statements from Nick Saban, Ryan Day, and other top

college football coaches state that NIL is fundamentally altering recruiting priorities nationwide. Saban states, “Guys are looking to where can I develop value right now and more about what can I get instantly in terms of getting in the portal or going to another school” (Smith, 2024). He further warns, “Guys are not going to school where they can create the most value for their future, guys are going to school where they can make the most money” (Dellenger, 2023) and argues that “The people out there need to know this model is unsustainable” (Hudak, 2025). Similarly, Day acknowledges the growing influence of NIL, stating, “It was never part of the conversation, then it became part of the conversation, and it’s trending towards being *the* conversation for a lot of folks” (Hope, 2022). These perspectives illustrate NIL’s interpretive flexibility within SCOT, where some coaches view NIL as a necessary evolution of athlete compensation, while others perceive it as an existential threat to competitive balance. Additionally, these perspectives reinforce this study’s findings that NIL’s impact extends beyond UVA and is transforming recruiting across the country.

The incorporation of student-athlete perspectives would offer valuable insights into how NIL has shaped their experiences and decisions. A report by Ally Clifft found that the most common words athletes associated with NIL were “money,” “connection,” and “opportunity,” with “money” being the most common (Clifft, 2022). Further research should explore how athletes perceive NIL’s role in their recruiting decisions and long-term development. Similarly, investigating NIL collectives, which play a significant role in facilitating NIL deals, could shed light on how financial resources and policy decisions influence recruiting strategies. For example, a recent multi-million-dollar donation to Cav Futures, the NIL collective supporting UVA football, demonstrates the growing role of these organizations in shaping recruiting and program success. According to the announcement, this donation is the largest in UVA football

history and is intended to “equip the coaching staff with the resources to attract, develop and retain top talent” (Fitzgerald, 2024). Furthermore, it aims to “fuel strategies to strengthen Virginia football’s program while addressing the growing financial challenges of this new era of intercollegiate athletics and talent acquisition” (Fitzgerald, 2024). NIL collectives act as key social groups shaping the view of NIL. Their financial influence shifts power dynamics in recruiting, leading to negotiations among institutions, athletes, and regulatory bodies on how NIL should be structured. This underscores the increasing financial influence of NIL collectives and emphasizes the need for further research into their role in recruiting processes.

Applying the insights gained from this research to my engineering career involves utilizing the SCOT framework to understand how technological systems and policies are shaped by social interactions and stakeholder dynamics (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). Recognizing the role of social, economic, and regulatory factors in shaping technology is vital for designing effective and equitable solutions. This research reinforces the importance of stakeholder engagement, continuous feedback, and iterative improvements in policy development and engineering innovation. Just as NIL is being shaped by stakeholder negotiations, engineering solutions must account for competing interests and shifting social contexts to achieve stability and widespread adoption. By integrating these principles, I can contribute to developing sustainable and adaptable technological solutions that account for social, economic, and regulatory challenges, ensuring long-term success and impact.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of NIL has fundamentally reshaped college recruiting, shifting priorities from relational to transactional interactions and emphasizing immediacy over long-term development. This research, analyzed through the SCOT framework, highlights the dynamic interactions between various stakeholders and the evolving landscape of NIL. While NIL provides athletes with financial opportunities, it has also introduced instability and inequities, underscoring the need for continuous adjustment to ensure fairness and sustainability. Future research should expand to include more institutions, incorporate quantitative data, and explore the perspectives of student-athletes and collectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding. The takeaway message is the importance of stakeholder engagement and iterative improvements in creating equitable and sustainable NIL practices. By recognizing the social dynamics driving these changes, college athletics can evolve towards a system that balances financial opportunity, competitive fairness, and long-term athlete development.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Elizabeth Ehrmann Interview Questions

1. What do you do in your role at UVA?
2. What is your overall perception of NIL, and its impact on the UVA football program?
3. How do you ensure compliance with NIL policies and laws?
4. What challenges have arisen since the introduction of NIL?
5. From your perspective, how has the recruiting process changed for college football recruits?
6. Has the partnership with Cav Futures changed the landscape of college athletics at UVA?
7. How are NIL deals managed and confirmed?
8. Is there any information given to recruits regarding NIL during the recruitment process?
9. What changes do you think could be made or should be made to improve NIL?
10. In your opinion, has NIL reached a point of closure and stabilization?

### Appendix B: Lindsey Morris Interview Questions

1. What do you do in your role at UVA?
2. What is your overall perception of NIL, and its impact on the UVA football program?
3. Has the approach or way of recruiting changed since the introduction of NIL?
4. Is there a major difference in how you recruit high school athletes versus transfer athletes?
5. What challenges have arisen since the introduction of NIL?
6. What advantages have you seen from NIL?
7. Have the athletes and recruits' priorities changed with the implementation of NIL?
8. At UVA, has NIL been a major factor in athletes transferring out?
9. How do you balance the need to be competitive and want to recruit top talent when you may not have the same resources other top programs have?
10. What do you think the future of NIL and recruiting will look like at UVA?
11. In your opinion, has NIL reached a point of closure and stabilization?

#### Appendix C: Justin Speros Interview Questions

1. What do you do in your role at UVA?
2. What is your overall perception of NIL, and its impact on the UVA football program?
3. Has the approach or way of recruiting changed since the introduction of NIL?
4. How have the priorities for high school athletes and transfer athletes changed since the introduction of NIL?
5. How has NIL affected the roster management at UVA?
6. How has NIL impacted your ability to compete with other programs for top talent?
7. How would you change or improve NIL?
8. In your opinion, has NIL reached a point of closure and stabilization?