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## It's All Relative: A Study on the Acceptance of Family Employment in College Athletics

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## **It's All Relative**

A study on the acceptance of family employment in college athletics

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A Thesis Study  
Presented to  
Dr. Richard A. Young  
Lynn University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Masters of Science in Sports Administration

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By  
Jennifer E. Cirillo  
2002

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## **ABSTRACT**

Nepotism is a dirty little word: Related individuals work together in entertainment, medicine, education and yes, even sports administration. This study proposes to identify the acceptance of relatives, by blood or by marriage, working together in NCAA Division II colleges in the southeastern United States. "Nepotism" is an arguably accurate descriptor of arrangements of relatives working together. However, the potential for real as well as asserted preferential treatment is shown to exist. Further, as the trend of couples working in the same discipline grows, whether or not a candidate accepts a position may be determined by the potential manager's acceptance of hiring relatives.

## CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

The hiring of relatives in sports has had some support, and has been particularly noted in football. **“People (hire sons) all over the country. There’s been a bunch of coaches do that. Bobby Bowden’s done it, Lou Holtz has done it, and Spike Dykes has done it. And people do it in law firms and in construction companies and medical practices. So it really hasn’t been a problem for me.”** - R.C. Slocum, Head Football Coach, Texas A & M University, on the hiring of his son, Sean, to a full-time Assistant Coach position ( Homer, 1997, p. 1).

The Bowden’s, Bonds, Greise’s, Ali’s, and so many others have made sports and sports administration a family affair. When relatives work together, the word nepotism is often used to describe the arrangement. Nepotism is defined by Webster’s New Dictionary as; “Favoritism shown by persons in high office to relatives or close friends especially in granting jobs. (orig, because of favors bestowed by a pope on his nephews) (Nepotism, p. 779).” For the purpose of this study, we shall narrow this definition to apply only to relatives. “Relative” is further defined by Webster’s as: 3 “a person connected with another by blood or affinity (Relative p.987). “

Nepotism is sometimes referred to as “The Old Boys Network”. Fathers would hire sons and brothers, etc... In the late 1950’s and 1960’s many companies and educational institutions adopted anti-nepotism rules to ease the possibility of discrimination claims against them. This may have been spurred on by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin (EEOC, 1999). This Act does not cover relationship or marital status. Risser (2000) observes that many state and local laws do prohibit discrimination based on marital status (Paragraph 2). Thirty-eight states currently have

anti-nepotism rules on the books for their own state agency hiring practices (Paragraph 2).

Nepotism was founded in the earliest societal structures and was perpetuated in the industrial establishment through family business. As some businesses grew into larger corporations, family members often remained in place. Ford Motor Company, Standard Oil, and Cox Communications are examples of now large corporations that were started by families working together.

My interest in this research topic stems from my long-term career objectives. My husband and I are both dedicated to developing careers in athletic administration. We have heard of relatives and spouses that enjoy a successful working relationship and we would like to explore the possibility of coaching together.

It can be argued that relatives may have such complimentary skills that the pairing would be an asset to an athletic department. Others would argue that favoritism in coaching selection results in not hiring the best person for the job and thus hinders the athletic department. This research paper will serve as a tool of discovery to determine the feasibility of our career goals, namely the acceptance of a married coaching team over unmarried / unrelated coaching teams.

This past year, Bobby Bowden has pushed the envelope of anti-nepotism policies once again. He named his son, Jeff Bowden the Offensive Coordinator of the Florida State University Football team. Thomas (2001) observes that in order to bypass the university's nepotism policy, the chain of command structure of the football staff was reorganized( Paragraph 1). This allowed the younger Bowden to report to an Associate Head Coach who reports directly to the Athletic Director. Jeff Bowden can

serve as a coach on his father's football staff as long as his father is not in direct supervision of him (Paragraph 2).

The purpose of this study is to determine:

- 1) if related coaching teams are allowed in college athletic departments
- 2) whether Directors of Athletics accept nepotism and would allow relatives working in their departments, both in paid positions, provided it is allowed
- 3) if viewpoints of Athletic Directors differ on blood relatives coaching together versus married couples coaching together.

### **Hypothesis**

Hiring relatives in the same department is accepted practice in college athletics. The second hypothesis is that each college athletic program has had or does currently have relatives working together in their programs. The third hypothesis is that athletic directors accept blood relatives more than married couples working together in college athletic departments.

### **Limitation of the Study**

This paper will not address nepotism as it applies to friends because of the difficulty in determining whether a new hire is indeed a friend. Assistant coaches are often hired because of an existing relationship with a head coach. A further limitation of this study is assessing nepotism that takes place when homosexual couples work together in college athletics. These instances would prove to be particularly difficult to survey due to the privacy issues of sexual orientation. Another limitation of this study is the number of universities studied. A small sample in the Southeastern United States

was selected and may only be representative of this region. Also a limitation of this study is that all surveyed athletic directors work for private institutions and may experience the hiring process differently than directors at public institutions.



## CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

For such a widely disputed topic, nepotism has been studied very little. Authors of journal articles have, however, cited specific cases of nepotism. Nepotism often makes the headlines when someone is upset with a promotion or appointment of another person and feels preferential treatment was involved. Nepotism is also briefly covered in most business text as part of a discussion on business ethics.

As the number of women earning masters and doctorate degrees has increased, so has the number of academic couples. As R. Wilson (2001) notes, since many couples met while in graduate school they are often working in the same discipline. This is often true of doctors, lawyers, educators, etc... "A survey completed in academic 1989-90 found that among professors that were married, 35 percent of the males and 40 percent of the females reported that their spouses were also (in) academics (Paragraph 3)". R. Wilson (2001) continues, there is not only a rising trend of academic couples but couples who work in the same department. Decades ago, the norm was for hiring managers to hire only the male half of an academic couple, so to comply with an anti-nepotism policy (Paragraph 2).

Marriage is also rising among college athletes. Potts (2001) observes, the University of North Carolina, Greensboro has two married couples playing on their athletic teams (p. 4). These couples are finding their common experiences as student-athletes helped their relationships. "It was hard, but there's a higher level of understanding because we're both athletes and we know what it's like to be in practice," expressed Robyn Jameson (Potts, 2001).

Career disciplines are not only common among spouses, but run in blood-related families as well. Politicians pass on their spirit for public service and their name to their

children. Medicine, law, publishing, entertainment, sports and even academic careers seem to run in the family. "Higher education is brimming with academic offspring...For a profession that thrives on endless analysis, academic families are like a Freudian fantasy come true (Schneider, 1999). "

Couples in academia realize benefits from working together also. Some colleagues, however, have problems with academic couples working in their department. Some colleagues worry that faculty couples can team up to have too much influence in the department. Another worry is what would happen if something in the relationship went wrong (Wilson, S. 2000). Risser (1997) observes that, "In cases where relatives did not cause a problem at work but were fired merely because of an anti-nepotism policy, courts in some states found the employees had been discriminated against on the basis of marital status (Paragraph2)."

Although the growing trend of faculty couples working together is dissolving anti-nepotism policies at many private institutions, many public institutions still have them in place. State anti-nepotism statutes have been written regarding employment of all government employees, including state university employees. For example, Alabama Statute 205.01 Section 1.1 reads:

"No officer or employee of the state or any state department, board, bureau, committee, commission, institution, corporation, authority, or other agency of the state shall appoint any person related to him/her within the forth degree of affinity or consanguinity to any job, position, or office of profit with the state or with any of its agencies. Any person related to the appointing authority within the prohibited degree shall be ineligible to serve in any capacity with the state under authority of such an appointment, and any appointment so attempted shall be void. Whoever violates this

section is guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall be punished by a fine not to exceed \$500 or by imprisonment not to exceed one year, or both. This section shall not apply, however, in the case of an appointment of a person to a position in the classified service of the state made from the register of persons eligible as certified by the state director of personnel (Alabama College System, 2000).”

This nepotism policy has been “grandfathered in” as Section 1.2 states, “ The provisions of this section shall not apply to any individual or individuals employed as of September 16, 1963, in any branch, department, or bureau of the state, or the reappointment of any individuals employed on September 16, 1963 (Alabama Ss. 205.01 Section 1.2., 2000).

Private institution policies on the employment of related individuals vary in degree in scope. While some institutions have anti-nepotism rules that are unwritten but understood practice, other universities have maintained written policies to prevent conflicts of interest (Wilson, 2000, p. 4). Although these policies are often called “anti-nepotism”, instead of only addressing the possibility of preferential treatment in the hiring process, they may disallow relatives working together at all. As in Alabama State Board of Education Resolution 1.1 (2000) The rules may also state a degree of separation that is prohibited. This resolution prohibits a president from appointing anyone with the forth degree of separation related by blood or by marriage (ACS, 2000) Relatives within the second degree would be parents, children, siblings, grandparents and first cousins. Relatives of the forth degree would include distant third-cousins.

The rules against relatives not working together do not completely control preferential treatment in the hiring process. For example, when preferential treatment is given to a friend or a wife of a friend. This is the accusation in the presidential

appointment of Joanne Tomblin at Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College. Even though she had served 18 years at the college and most recently was a Vice President, critics charged that she was appointed over other candidates because her husband is the State Senate President (Bassinger, 1999, p. 4).

The complications of hiring a related coaching team is not only a concern for the applicants but also for the potential hiring administrator. Athletic Directors deal with a significant amount of stress. Personnel issues and external pressures to run successful athletic programs are among the stressors. Administrators feel pressure to make just and fair hiring decisions that are in the best interests of the program, compliant with all regulations and viewed positively by their multiple publics (Yow, Humphrey, et al., 1999).

The review of the literature shows that the employment of relatives has not been consistently addressed in the business world, in government or in academia. Certain professions and disciplines commonly attract both blood related as well as marriage related individuals. Higher education is a career choice that tends to run in families. The potential for real as well as asserted preferential treatment is shown to exist. Both legislative statutes and private institution policies are enacted to address this situation. The need for these rules as well as their effectiveness when they do exist are issues open to continued debate and dispute.

### CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

This research surveys thirty-six NCAA Division II College Athletic Directors in the Southeast United States. The surveyed schools are selected because they are all private institutions and their human resources departments do not always follow the mandated anti-nepotism policies for state agencies.

The schools are also selected because they do not have intercollegiate football teams. As mentioned in the Introduction (section I, paragraph I), Nepotism has been particularly noted in college football programs. Therefore, schools without football programs are chosen to be included in the survey, to get a better understanding of the frequency and acceptance of relatives working together in a non-football athletic program. Schools selected are located in the Southeastern United States. Mailing logistics and costs contributed to the selection of southeastern schools, as this research was based in Florida.

Three NCAA athletic conferences met the criteria: The Gulf South Conference, The Southern Intercollegiate Conference and the Sunshine State Conference (Exhibit A).

The survey questions are formulated to be brief, yes or no questions. The survey is comprised of seven questions (Exhibit B). It was designed to be concise so that more respondents may be inclined to complete and return the survey. The survey had been mailed via U.S. Postal Service to lower cost and allow for written response. A six week deadline had been established from the time of mailing to reply using the self-addressed stamped envelope enclosed with each survey.

Returned responses had been opened and read for completion of questions. Answers had been tallied for each question and recorded graphically.

The data gathered is interpreted in order to evaluate the material. This research is conducted in order to gather information that may tell us that there is a bias against relatives working together in Division II NCAA collegiate athletic departments.

The impact of this research in the field of Sports Administration may provide more knowledge about the discrimination of relatives in the hiring of college athletic department personnel. Academic couples seeking employment in college athletics could use this research as a tool for career planning. Furthermore, this research could serve as a benchmark for future studies on nepotism in this field and help identify emerging trends over time.

## CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

Of the thirty-six directors surveyed (Exhibit A), 66 percent completed and returned the survey (Exhibit D). One survey did not indicate the name of the Athletic Director completing the survey. However, the source institution has been determined by the envelope postmark.

Question # 1: "whether the university human resource policies governed the employment of individuals in their athletic department, 2 Athletic Directors indicated "no" and Twenty-two indicated "yes".

Question #2: On the question of whether their institution had an anti-nepotism policy in place, 8 respondents indicated "no" and sixteen indicated "yes".

By combining the data of the first two questions, of the twenty-four respondents, eighteen must consider their university anti-nepotism policy as it relates to the employment of individuals in their athletic department.

Question #3: Six of the respondents indicated they are aware of related individuals working together in the same department. All respondents said they were aware of related individuals working at their institution, but in different departments. Eight of the respondents said they currently have relatives working in their athletic department, however none of these relatives were in direct supervision of the other (Exhibit E).

One respondent has a blood relative working in his Athletic Department:

At Arkansas-Monticello, one of the Athletic Director's sons is an Assistant Football Coach. The father is not the direct supervisor of his son in this situation therefore they are not in violation of the university anti-nepotism policy.

Seven respondents have married couples working in their athletic departments:

At West Alabama the Head Athletic Trainer is the husband of the Head Softball Coach.

At West Georgia the wife of an Assistant Athletic Director is a part-time Cheerleading

Coach. At Henderson State University the Girls Volleyball Coach and Girls Basketball

Coach are married. At Valdosta State University the full-time Softball Coach is the

husband of the part-time Concession Coordinator. At Saint Leo the Head Basketball

Coach and Head Trainer are married. At Lynn University the Men's and Women's Crew

Coaches are married. Saint Leo University also indicated that they have relatives

working in their athletic department.



## CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS

The hypothesis: "Hiring relatives in the same department is an accepted practice in college athletics "was supported by the finding 71% of the respondents indicated they would allow spouses working in their athletic department, and 79% would allow blood relatives provided they were the best candidates (Exhibit F).

The hypothesis: "Each college athletic program has had or currently does have relatives working together in their programs was not supported as 21% of respondents indicated they would not allow either blood or marriage related individuals work in their department (Exhibit F).

The hypothesis: "Athletic Directors accept blood relatives more than married couples working together in college athletic departments" was supported. Of the eight respondents that indicated they do have relatives working in their athletic department, only one indicated it was a blood relation. However, a higher percentage answered they would hire blood over married relatives (Exhibit F).

My conclusions are: 1) that private institutions in the Southeastern United States with Division II athletic programs will allow relatives working in the same department as long as one relative is not in direct supervision of the other, 2) that the majority of Athletic Directors will hire relatives to work in their athletic

department and 3) although blood relatives are preferred in the hiring process over married relatives, the preference gap is not that great.

## Exhibit A

**Survey Sample: Athletic Directors of Colleges and Universities in the Southeastern United States with Division II athletic programs (non-football playing).**

**Gulf South Conference**

Arkansas Tech University, Mr. Earle Doman  
 University of Alabama in Huntsville, Mr. Jim Harris  
 Lincoln Memorial University, Mr. Jack Bondurant  
 University of Montevallo, Mr. Mike Cancilla  
 University of North Alabama, Mr. Dan Summy  
 – Valdosta State University, Mr. Herb Reinhardt  
 University of West Alabama, Dee Outlaw  
 University of West Florida, Mr. Richard Berg  
 State University of West Georgia, Mr. Edward Murphy  
 University of Arkansas at Monticello, Mr. Alvy Early  
 University of Central Arkansas, Mr. Arch Jones  
 Christian Brothers University, Mr. Michael Daush  
 Delta State University, Dr. James Jordan  
 Henderson State University, Mr. Sam Goodwin  
 Mississippi University for Women, Dr. Jo Spearman  
 Southern Arkansas University, Mr. Jay Adcox

**Southern Intercollegiate Conference**

Clark Atlanta University, Mr. Richard Cosby  
 Albany State College, Mr. Dan Land  
 Fort Valley State College, Mr. Edmond Wyche  
 Kentucky State University, Mr. Derrick K. Ramsey  
 Lane College, Mr. J.L. Perry  
 LeMoyne-Owen College, Mr. E.D. Wikens  
 Miles College, Mr. Augustus James  
 Morehouse College, Mr. Arthur J. McAfee, Jr.  
 Morris Brown College, Mr. Gene Bright  
 Paine College, Mr. Ronnie Spry  
 Savannah State University, Mr. Charles J. Elmore  
 Tuskegee University, Mr. Rick Comegy

**Sunshine State Conference**

Barry University, Mr. Michael L. Covone  
 Eckerd College, Mr. James R. Harley  
 Florida Southern College, Mr. Mike Roberts  
 Florida Institute of Technology, Mr. William K. Jurgens  
 Lynn University, Dr. Richard A. Young  
 Rollins College, Mr. J. Phillip Roach  
 Saint Leo University, Mr. Francis X. Reidy  
 University of Tampa, Mr. Larry Marfise

Jennifer Cirillo  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**Exhibit B**

August 10, 2000

[Click **here** and type recipient's address]

Dear Sir or Madam:

**Please take a moment out of your busy schedule to help me.** I am working on my thesis to complete my Masters of Science degree in Sports Administration from Lynn University, Boca Raton, FL. The topic of my thesis relates to nepotism in college athletics. I have enclosed a short survey for you to complete as well as a return envelope.

I understand you receive many requests. If you wish to confirm the purpose of this survey, you may feel free to contact my advisor:

Dr. Dick Young  
Director of Athletics  
Lynn University  
[REDACTED]

**I would truly appreciate your response.**

Sincerely,

Jennifer Cirillo

**Exhibit C**

**SURVEY QUESTIONS**

Please check next to the appropriate answer.

1. Do your University Human Resource Policies govern the employment of individuals in your Athletic Department?  
No \_\_\_\_\_  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Does your University have an anti-nepotism policy in place?  
No \_\_\_\_\_  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Are you aware of related individuals working at your University?  
No \_\_\_\_\_  
Yes, in the same department \_\_\_\_\_  
Yes, in different departments \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Are relatives currently working in paid positions in your athletic department?  
No \_\_\_\_\_  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ If Yes, please explain relation and positions \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Do relatives serve in any volunteer capacities in your athletic department?  
No \_\_\_\_\_  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. If there is no or were no anti-nepotism policy governing your athletic department, would you object to spouses being employed in your athletic department given they were both qualified candidates?  
No \_\_\_\_\_  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Would you object to blood relatives working together in your athletic department given they were both qualified candidates?  
No \_\_\_\_\_  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_

# Survey Response Rate

(out of 36 total sent)

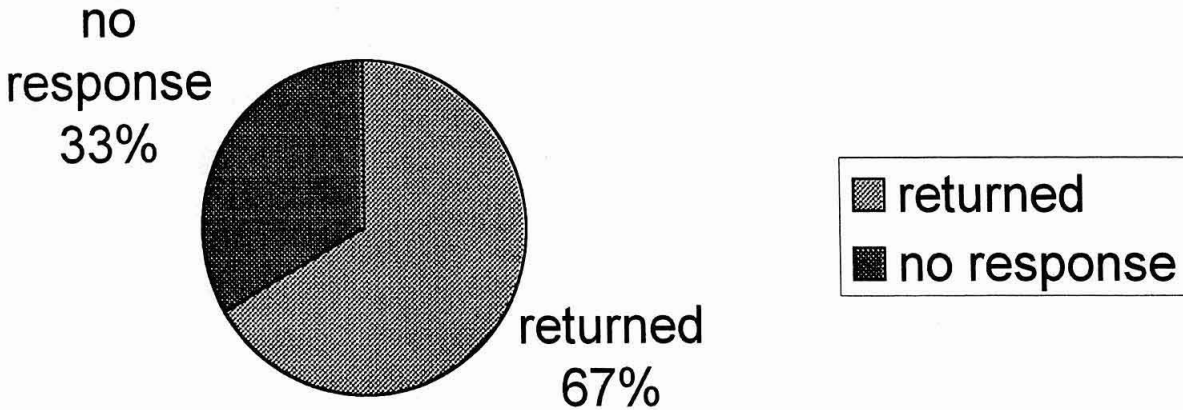
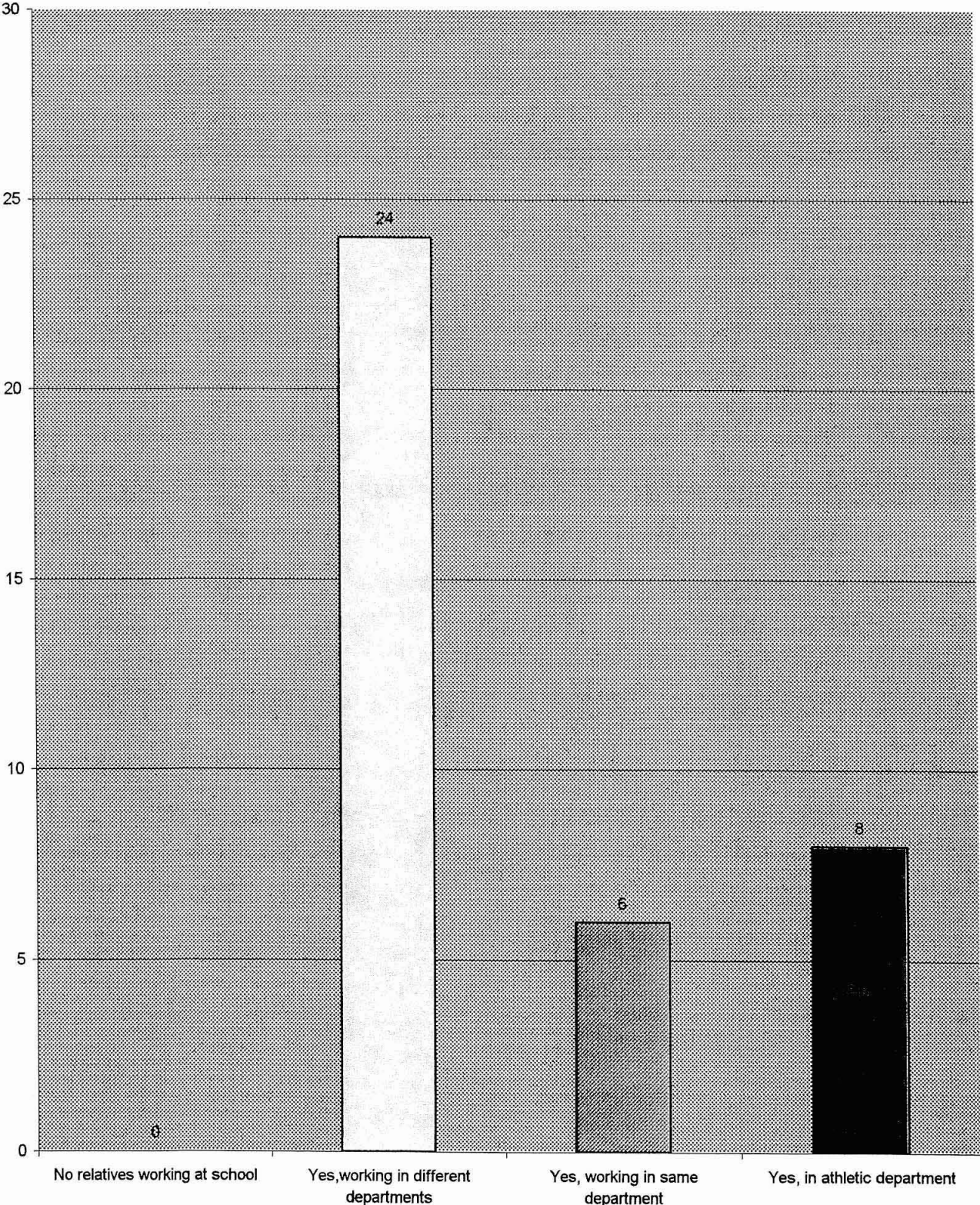
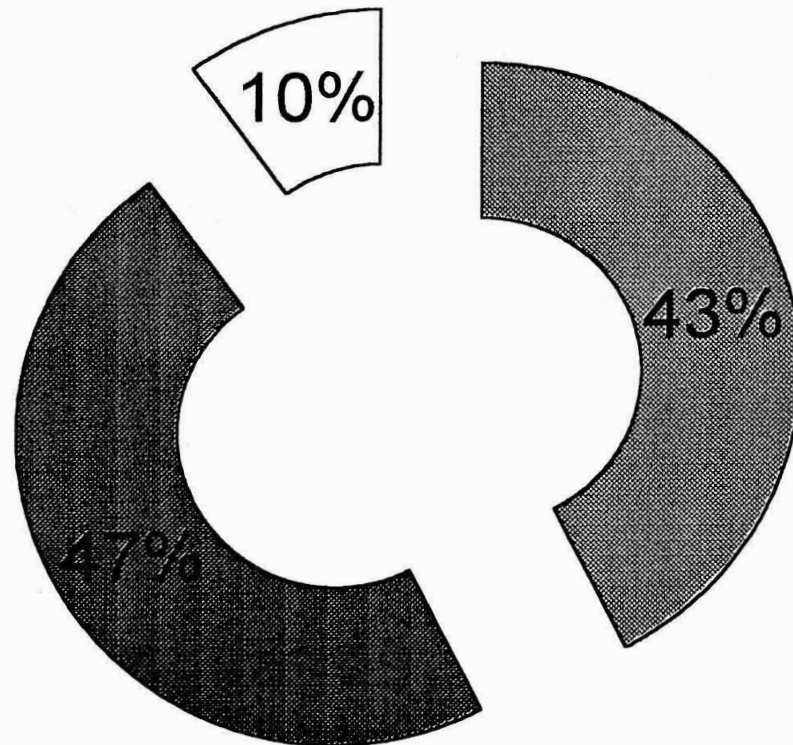


Exhibit E

Occurances of Relatives Working at Surveyed Institutions



# Athletic Director Views on Hiring Relatives



- Would hire spouses
- Would hire blood relatives
- Would not allow either



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