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How a Successful Collegiate Athletic Department  
Can Benefit a University

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Education

By

Matthew Butterfield

2014

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

How a Successful Collegiate Athletic Department

Can Benefit a University

By

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Master of Arts in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Val D. Rust, Chair

University sports have grown and become bigger throughout their existence, creating an industry that is profoundly involved with revenue, making it difficult to manage and maintain. This created different levels, rankings, and divisions within sports to separate large and small scale universities. This created a gap and discrepancies between well-off schools within the same levels and divisions. However, some schools that are not well off have been able to thrive and continue building up their athletic programs while others have continued to struggle. It is important to understand what factors separate one from the other so that more schools can have and build successful athletic programs. This paper will outline how these factors operate and then discuss how having a strong college sports team built on these factors help the university as a whole because they expose the university to the public, generate revenue, bring a sense of community to universities and towns, enhance student recruitment and create a sense of prestige for any university.

The Thesis of Matthew Butterfield is approved.

Carlos Torres

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Val D. Rust, Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

Dedication

To the Butterfield Family

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Thesis: College sports help universities because they embody American values, expose the university to the public, generate revenue, enrich the lives of individuals, help to create a sense of prestige within a university, and improve potential student recruitment. This can be seen in all sports at all levels of the NCAA, but often times most especially in major sports like football.



## **Introduction**

In 1905, the President of the United States and many university leaders came together to discuss the issue of collegiate sports competition, especially football, because it clearly marked a topic of national significance. The result of this meeting was the founding of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, whose mission was to protect student-athletes and continue to implement principles with an increased emphasis on both academic and athletic excellence. Division I (D-I or D-1) is the highest level of intercollegiate athletics authorized by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the United States. Division I schools consist of schools with larger budgets, more elaborate facilities, and more athletic scholarships than that of schools in the weaker or less prominent divisions such as Divisions II and III. These levels were once called the University Division of NCAA, but changed in 1973 to help indicate the different kinds of powers for each level, ultimately allowing Division I to be the highest athletic power in collegiate athletics (Crowley, 2006). This change occurred because many schools simply did not have the money or athletic skill to be competing on the same playing field. Many lower division programs were smaller schools that could not afford to travel to certain competitions or even hold enough fans in their stadiums. This imbalance created an issue that would change the structure of college sports forever.

The divisional changes allowed for some universities to expand the open markets and promote their universities at the highest level because of the division they were in. Rankings also played a role by projecting which teams would outperform others in the upcoming season. Many universities began to base the success of their athletic programs from these rankings and monetary income they received. Schools began to compare themselves to one another and compete off the field, as well as on the field. The competition started to become bigger than just

the games themselves. Now, many other aspects began to become important, such as more money for budgets, more elaborate facilities, larger fan bases, better alumni support (boosters and donors), etc.

As a result of these developments, Division I sports have become larger than anyone could have imagined. Collegiate athletic programs' records of winning have become more and more important throughout the years. Division I member institutions use a substantial amount of resources in order to operate their programs. Each university's athletic program needs large-scale planning, similar to that of Fortune 500 companies. Schools, presidents, boards, professors, students, athletic directors, coaches, and staff work to create strategic plans to keep pace with other successful college athletic programs and help build their athletic programs to become successful on and off the field.

Having a successful athletic program certainly comes with a price and a hefty reward. While the student-athlete is supposed to remain the priority, it is no secret that a successful athletic program results in financial benefit for the university as a whole. Athletic programs bring in revenue from ticket sales, merchandising, concessions, as well as financial benefit to the NCAA as a whole through lucrative TV and radio contracts. The financial benefit doesn't stop at earnings, however, as boosters and donors have been known to put millions of dollars into more prestigious programs.

Because of the magnitude of the financial and other benefits that come with a successful athletic program, many Division I institutions expect to be competitive in most, if not all, sports, which is why there have been so many changes in strategies, administrations, and coaching staff. It seems that every day there is news about a coaching or administration change. In the age of

social media, these hirings and firings usually happen publicly. College sports are now considered a business enterprise, bringing the university benefits similar to that of a successful company. In particular, successful university athletic programs create a great amount of revenue and resources for the school. College sports bring forth a great amount of value to the institution that they are associated with.

Sports have grown and become bigger throughout their existence. Many factors have caused this and ultimately created an industry that, now, is heavily involved with mass amounts of revenue that is difficult to manage, maintain, and allocate. Different levels, rankings, and divisions within sports separate large- versus small-scale universities. Some schools that are not financially stable have been able to thrive and continue building up their athletic programs while others have continued to struggle to create a reputable program. It is important to understand what factors separate one from the other so that more schools can have the opportunity to build successful athletic programs. In the first part of this paper, I will outline how these factors operate. In the second part of the paper, I will discuss how having a strong college sports team that is developed on these factors helps the university as a whole, as it exposes the university to the public, generates revenue, and enriches the lives of individuals.

## **Thesis Question**

In this study I plan to explore all the ways in which having an athletic department can be beneficial to a university. Using external literature and research, as well as experience of my own, this study will seek to answer one specific question, and the question will read as follows:

Question: How can having an athletic department within a university benefit that particular university as a whole?

## **Research Methods**

In my study, I plan to use case studies that will serve as specific examples unique to their particular university. I do not intend to generalize so that these cases would pertain to every university, but rather give specific examples of how athletic departments benefit universities in a specific ways. I intend on using examples from my own experience as a graduate assistant at UCLA, as well as an undergraduate employee at the University of Colorado and Arizona State University, respectively.

In addition to my personal experience, I will use the Alabama swim team, of which I was granted full access to survey and interview Head Coach Dennis Pursley, as a case study for a nonrevenue-producing sport within a major revenue-producing athletic department. I will also look closely into the Texas A&M football program by investigating how much a successful football program and star athletes can benefit universities. In addition to these individual case studies, my thesis will look closely at specific research and statistical analyses released by the NCAA to demonstrate how schools have seen improvement secondary to athletic success.

My study will use these cases and analysis, as well as several articles and journals written with an unbiased perspective on the topic as it seeks to answer the originally stated thesis question.

## **Factors for Strong Collegiate Sports Programs**

A synergistic strategic plan that intertwines academic and athletic prowess will provide a university with the utmost benefits that will ultimately lead to a reputable and successful institution long term. Schools with top-notch resources, administration, athletes, and coaches collectively, will provide the university grounds to establish a strong collegiate athletic program. Just as an individual team needs strong athletes and coaches who support the common cause to be number when, so too the university as a whole needs strong and involved leadership in order to support a successful athletic department. The importance of a board of regents and university president who believe in the power of their athletic department cannot be over stated, While education remains the highest priority of university board members and presidents, it seems more and more are realizing the impact a competitive athletic department can have on the university as a whole. As more presidents realize the value of an athletic department, their influence becomes more important to its success.

There are numerous parties involved within a school's athletic program. University presidents, university administration, athletic directors, athletic administration, faculty members, students, alumni, boosters, donors, people within the community, and so many more who want to be involved with successful teams and athletic programs. The primary focus of this argument will be on the administration of the school.

### **Administration**

Anyone that is associated with the sports program or university strives to be the best and be ranked the highest. That is the nature of the American society and how competitive we have become. All universities are working toward their goal of becoming the best in each particular sport they participate in. Prestigious facilities and a winning record are just some of what attracts

star athletes to attend certain institutions because they want to receive the best training, social recognition, and work with other like-minded athletes and coaches. High rankings do not just happen over time. Rather, there needs to be a specific strategy that everyone within the program can work towards together; a strategy that is implemented by coaches, as well as planned and developed by both head athletic department officials and head university officials. It is getting the administrative leaders at all levels of the university on the same page about the importance of an athletic department to a successful and thriving university that helps to separate schools that have top-tier athletic departments from the universities whose athletic departments tend to struggle more (Elgar, 2011).

It is important that the community supports the athletic program because they provide an extra spark and confidence within the players during competition (Elgar, 2011). Imagine playing a college football game in front of 109,901 screaming fans that all support you and your team. This is what the University of Michigan Wolverines football players experience on a weekly basis. Their fans make it that much more difficult for the opposing team to win. The noise, the intimidation, and the chaos create an additional distraction for any team coming into that stadium. The community support, involvement, and funding all provide athletic programs a powerful boost to assist them in becoming a flourishing athletic program. Though the community support is extremely important for any school, the athletic administration is vital to athletic success on and off the field of play.

The community support can be obtained only through success, marketing, and creating a platform starting from within the administration that puts an emphasis on the importance of successful student athletes. Once a university shows support for its own athletic department, community support tends to follow. The newest and best athletic facilities are in large part

funded by boosters, alumni and community supporters, which will be looked into in considerable depth later in the paper. Many administrative leaders understand the value of a community backing, as well as national TV and radio coverage.

The universities' administration make decisions in regards to what its athletic department will receive in terms of funding, revenue, and resources. They must look at the big picture of the school to budget the revenue for particular departments within the school.

## **Resources**

The athletic administration must provide the plan to the rest of the department and coaching staff of each sport. The athletic director determines how they will promote each program, expand their market, where the funding will go, and how it will be distributed. Going back to the example of recruiting prospective student athletes, the athletic administration determines how much money each sport will receive and how it will be divvied. An example of a program that has struggled recently is the University of Colorado at Boulder. Recently, the university's president fired their athletic director who was not able to maintain the athletic success they had been experiencing when he was hired. Their athletic budget did not have enough money to remain in contention with other schools. Their athletic department asked for budget cuts from several sports causing them to forfeit ten percent of their annual budget for seasonal operations (Henderson, 2013). This process can even dwindle down to the sports director of operations, who often times has to produce budget percentages to the athletic administration to ensure proper use of resources and costs. The administration plays a vital role in the hiring and/or firing process. Firing a seasoned employee and investing a program's potential in a new coach or director can change the direction of any developing team. They have to be the ones to determine who will lead the young men and women in their particular sport.



They have to decide if that coach or assistant is the right fit for the job and the one that could jumpstart the program and maintain a program's success. Their decisions can make or break their athletic program or a particular team.

## **Coaches**

Athletic coaches play a crucial role in the success of their team and program (Barron, 2014). Coaches provide their student athletes with team standards, philosophy, and how the team will be run. Not only that, they have to provide the strategy of game play and drills to help their players improve to become the best they can be. Furthermore, they have to make sure their players attend class, remain eligible to play the sport, and ultimately graduate. The coaches must be able to recognize true talent and recruit prospective student athletes that will form the foundation of their future team's success. Many of the athletes that enroll, especially if they are high-level players, have academic deficiencies. Their coaches must enforce rules set forth by the NCAA and the school to ensure its players are eligible to play. In order to meet eligibility, coaches require the players to meet with academic advisors, tutors, and make all required appointments. Coaches do more than just enforce rules; they also want their players to become the best person they can possible be. Coaches hire speakers to come talk to the team about all kinds of issues such as sex, drugs, alcohol, money, motivation, etc. Coaches want their players to become successful even after their playing careers are over. They want to make an impact on these young men and women because they can shape them to become a more mature and better person. College students are still young, maturing, and growing. Most of these athletes are leaving their homes and families when they head to college. Spending day after day together, the coaching staff naturally becomes these athletes' primary caregivers and aid in creating a smooth transition from high school to college and beyond. Coaches are mentors, counselors, guardians,

teachers, authority figures, and so much more to these student athletes. They have a direct impact on these young adults' personal lives and future athletic careers. Schools can have the best players in the country on their team, but that does not mean they will win and be successful. These great players needed guidance and direction in their lives in order to be the best they can possible be. These players have to work together as a team to get bigger, stronger, faster, quicker, and smarter. Team unity and cohesion cannot occur without the proper and necessary direction and guidance from a professional, third-party perspective, the coaching staff.

Many athletic programs expect to be competitive in most, if not all, sports, which is why there has been so many changes in strategies, administrations, and coaching staff. There have been numerous transformations of athletic programs throughout the past few years. For example, Boise State University (BSU), once a junior college, is now a well-known school respected for its athletics. In 1996, BSU moved up to Division I and began playing competitively just three years later (Ourada, Patricia K. 2012). Already, athletes are fighting to attend BSU for its athletic program's growing success. In football, Boise State is becoming the cradle of coaches because dozens of coaches within the past fifteen years have gone on to become head coaches of major universities. They have had an administration that has done a phenomenal job hiring the right kind of coach to run their athletic program. Their coaches built BSU into a prominent athletic powerhouse that is competitive in all sports.

## **Public Exposure**

College sports help the university develop a stronger relationship with the fans, the alumni, and the local community. The large and enthusiastic crowds that assemble for college sporting events often show enthusiasm and loyalty to the academic college or university. The promotion and exploitation of this attitude come from the colleges and universities themselves,

whose consistent and purposeful policy over generations has enhanced and developed the sports component of their institutions to produce exactly the result achieved. We have, at the beginning of the 21st century, a college sports enterprise designed by the colleges and universities themselves. College sports are a great success for the institutions that have relentlessly pursued their expansion for more than a century. Sports have a drawing power for college alumni and friends that exceed almost any other activity the university could generate.

Having a successful athletic program has a tremendous impact on a university. The students that attend the athletic functions begin to generate and develop team spirit and support for their team. The support the students give their athletic teams provide energy for the team to play better and give them a boost during game play. Not only that, the atmosphere that is created will provide life long memories to all that attend the sporting event. School spirit was listed as the number three most important aspect of why universities have athletic programs (Meier, 2010). Social recognition will enhance recruiting for that team and the overall campus experience.

In collegiate athletic competition, the winning score of a particular sporting event makes a team and program successful. The more games a team wins the better the program is. College athletics has turned into a business venture for universities. Now, these universities have to put forth effort to bring in top level talent in order to be successful and become the best. Having top-notch talent and skills are uncommon, which is why there is only one team that can win a national championship in their particular sport every year. Many schools compete at high levels to get the best echelon of talent for their team. Once they are able to get the prospective student athlete enrolled, they will have a higher chance of winning games, ultimately getting them closer to the top of their sport. As many schools compete and contend for the nations' top talent to

attend their school, the competition for these players gives the university a chance to show these players what that university offers. The recruits get the opportunity to see the athletic facilities, the campus, the coaching staff, and all the resources that the school can provide them while they attend their university. These recruiting tools can either help or hinder the institution and athletic program from landing a big name recruit because many schools do not have sufficient enough facilities or resources than other Division I programs. There becomes a disparity between many programs because of the lack of funding for recruiting, facilities, and coaching staff. Programs need enough funding to be competitive for the nations' highest profile recruits. When schools become interested in a potential recruit, the department is responsible for funding the entire process. The recruiting process includes scouting trips and official visits, which allows the school to pay for the prospective student athlete to come and visit the school (within a 48 hour window) without having to take money out of his pocket to pay for the trip. There are a lot of players and families across the country that are not able to travel to schools because they do not have enough money, so the NCAA allows for the school to pay for the prospective student athletes' travel for that two day period. Typically the best program find a means to allocate more money in the budget to pay a quality coaching staff, maintain up-to-date facilities, and recruit the best athletes (Sparvero, 2013).

In the United States, sports have always been embedded in the American culture. Three of the nation's five most popular team sports were developed in North America: American football, basketball and ice hockey, whereas soccer and baseball were developed in England. The four major leagues in the United States are the National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), and the National Hockey League (NHL). The American passion for organized college sports brings an opportunity for individuals

to test their strength, skill, strategy, and competitive values in a highly stylized and structured manner within their respective sport. These venues bring forth outcomes that help produce and clearly define winners and losers. The competitive nature of sports is a universal societal entity, and every society throughout the years has had its games – some ceremonial, some symbolic of social values, some designed to highlight class structure, and others purposeful in training for war or other real-life challenges. The American college version of sports speaks to all of these purposes. Nonetheless, because by tradition and rule it can engage only participants belonging to the student body of a college, many of those who attend and follow these games take sports' success as symbolic of the college's enduring value as an educational institution. The games themselves recur repeatedly, each time starting from a new beginning every year. We cannot rewind and start anew the competition of life that sports model, but we can participate vicariously in the endlessly renewed process of sports where each episode, game, or season begins fresh every year with no predetermined winners or losers and with an expectation of success undiminished by prior failures.

Sports are a platform for the fans and the community to become involved and engaged with the program. Fans may show their support by attending sporting events and buying merchandise. A large crowd generates funding to the university, thus allowing the athletic department to distribute money to certain sports and areas of need or focus. More funding can help land the new big name coach that can help change and/or turn around a program. There are coaches that are very well known and have proven time and time again that they have the right formula to recruit well and win games. Many top ranked recruits want to play for coaches who are proven or go to a school that has a successful athletic program. So the more a school wins in their athletic competitions, the more funding they will receive.

In addition to the student experience that is improved with collegiate athletics, recruiting can also be improved because of the atmosphere that the students generate. This can help because most prospective student athletes want to play in front of a lot of people and an atmosphere that creates excitement. Furthermore, if a team is successful, that institution's recruitment will have an increase number of applicants. For example, in 2006, the George Mason University basketball team made an impressive run to the Final Four during the NCAA March Madness tournament. GMU's number of applicants increased by twenty-two percent that year because of the recognition they received (Sparvero, 2013). Exposure attracts the attention of prospective student athletes and their parents.

Dating back to 1984 when Doug Flutie, an undersized quarterback for Boston College, won the Heisman trophy, Flutie gained national attention when he led his team to victory against the University of Miami Hurricanes to victory with just six seconds left in the game. As a result, "The Flutie Factor" was coined the term for an increase in applications after a significant athletic accomplishment. "Whether it's called the 'Flutie factor' or 'mission-driven intercollegiate athletics,' the effect of having a winning sports team is showing up at admissions offices nationwide." —USA Today, "*Winning One for the Admissions Office*," July 11, 1997 (McDonald, 1997). "The Flutie Factor" now is a term used to refer to a successful college sports team that increases the exposure and prominence of a university (McDonald, 1997). Boston College experienced a sharp increase in prospective student interest because of the exposure their received by having successful college sports. Their athletic program was able to market their teams and their school in order to attract the attention of the prospective students and their families. Scholarships offered to student athletes and recruitment of prospective students contribute to overall enrollment efforts.

## Case Studies

### How Both Sides Benefit: A Study Done by Kyle Judah (2010)

The benefits of a successful athletic department to a university are not limited simply to financial gain. Even with substantial ticket and merchandise sales many athletic programs do not bring in enough revenue to have any real impact on the university. Outside of the athletic powers, many athletic departments can even cause a university some financial hardship. While a successful athletic department, for purposes of this paper, is an athletic department that attracts a following and can bring profit to the university, the NCAA, and even the economy of an entire state, the non-financial benefits of a mid-tier athletic department is not limited to only these schools.

One way to assess the benefit of a successful athletic department at all competition levels is to measure the impact championship caliber years in the major sports have on enrollment for the university. *Forbes Magazine* reports that student-athletes are attracted to universities for countless reasons including academic success, national reputation, academic facilities and resources, location, weather, and any number of other factors (Salzberg, 2011). Among these reasons for choosing a school is the success of the athletic department. For many high school students the prospect of going to watch their school's teams play in the Final Four or a BCS bowl game or even the College World Series is one that would make him or her more likely to show an interest in the university and apply. The more prospective students a university can get to apply, the deeper the selection for acceptance and enrollment will be and the more selective an admissions department can be; bringing in higher level students and improving the academic standard and overall reputation of the school.

Kyle Judah (2010) discusses this impact, especially for the elite level power athletic departments, in his article for *The Sports Business Exchange* entitled “NCAA Championships are Changing the Game of College Admissions.” While the belief among academia is often justifiably against the importance placed on athletics over academics, the numbers suggest that successful athletic programs bring more interest from students of all backgrounds, including ones that could potentially contribute to improving the academic reputation of a university. According to Judah (2010), “Eighty-five percent of top administrators at College Football Bowl Subdivision schools believe that football and basketball coaches receive excessive compensation.” While this statistic is specific to coaches’ salaries, it is telling how many people on the academic side of universities view athletics and the significance placed on it. While there is room to debate whether athletics improves a campus, experience, and overall academic success of a student body, it is difficult to say that a coach or athletic department receives too much funding financially when one takes into consideration the amount of exposure and funding the top tier coaches in the major sports bring into universities across the country.

The afore mentioned exposure and funding coming from the athletic department can be measured in countless ways, but the numbers that Judah (2010) found in his study pertain to admissions and can be extremely telling about the direct impact a successful, high-level athletic team can have on admissions and the number of high school students who show interest in a university. The team used for Judah’s (2010) study was the 2009 University of North Carolina basketball team. North Carolina won the national championship that year, and while it is clearly an uncommon feat to win a national championship in any sport, it is always a goal of the top programs that pay the most elite coaches the highest salaries. Given this information we will focus on the payoffs of winning the national championship and how that can translate into more



money and a better, larger pool of prospective students to choose from. We will also examine how having just a top team in basketball and football (championship or not) pays off through admissions.

According to Judah's (2010) study, the number of applications to University of North Carolina rose by 2,957, or 15% from 2008 to the end of the 2009 basketball championship season. This exponential rise is unmatched through any other form of advertising or accomplishments that might draw interest from prospective students. The impact of this rise in interest is seen directly through revenue, but also indirectly on the impact future students might have on the campus that may have otherwise never considered the University of North Carolina. Through direct numbers the immediate impact of these extra applications is over \$200,000 in application fees. Beyond that Judah (2010) goes on to explain that "According to the University of North Carolina Admissions website, they admitted 32% of applicants, or 473 students, with 54% eventually enrolling, or 255 students. Tuition for an in-state student is \$17,424, and for out-of-state students, it costs \$35,740 every year. Enrolling 84% in-state students would equal 214 in-state students paying \$3,728,736 and 41 out-of-state students paying \$1,465,340 every year, resulting in \$5,194,076 in revenues every year...derived solely from their athletic success" (p. 64). That means that over the span of four years the University of North Carolina would have made in excess of 20 million dollars from students that potentially would have never been interested in applying if not for the success of the North Carolina basketball team. While the impact will never be as great as a national championship season, it is far-fetched to deny that the historical success of the program and continued recent success attracts students year in and year out. This five-million dollars per year for four years along with the year in and year out attraction

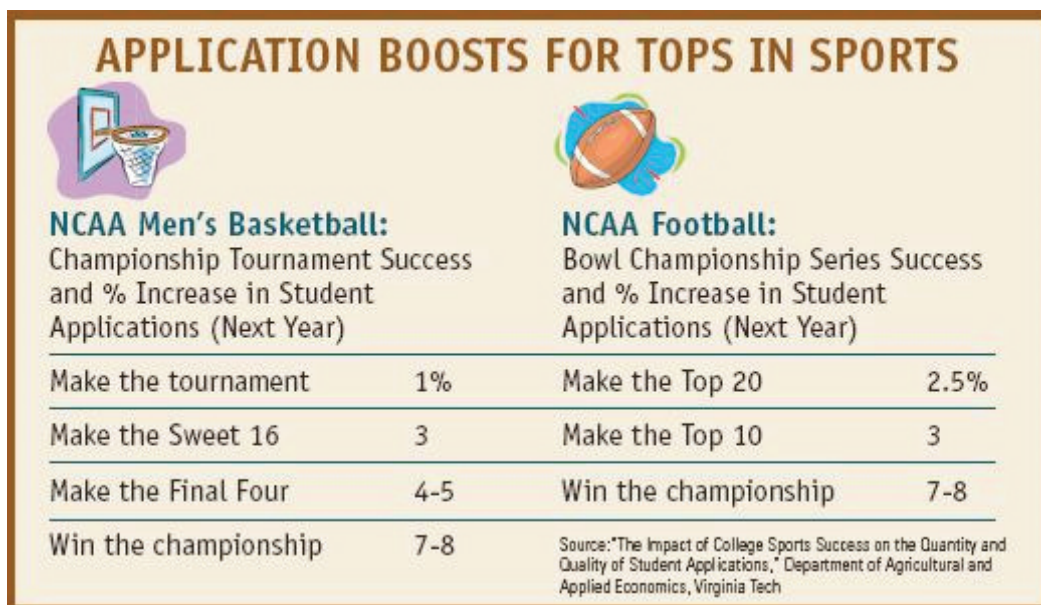
should make it much easier for university officials to justify the 1.35 million Head Coach Roy Williams made during the national championship season.

The impact of a winning season for an historical program like North Carolina basketball can be seen through a 15% increase in application interest, but according to a study by a George Mason professor after his university's 2006 Final Four run, the impact on smaller universities that have success at a national level can be substantially greater (Sparvero, 2013). According to Sparvero (2013) that was later published by Espn.com, "After George Mason's run, admissions inquiries increased 350 percent. Out-of-state applications increased 40 percent" (p. 23). The exposure that major sports gives to universities is unprecedented and can often take an unknown school and make them nationally well-known over night. The national recognition consistently results in higher levels of interest from prospective students all across the country. Higher levels of interest translates to more money through application fees and raised tuition rates, as well as a higher and more qualified pool of potential students to choose from; students that may go on to do more and give the University even more exposure than it otherwise may not have had if not for the success of the athletic department, or even a single team within the department.

According to Figure 1 released by *University Business Magazine*, it is not just basketball programs that see a substantial interest spike from athletic success. While these numbers average out by schools that are consistently in the top ten, like an Alabama football program or a Duke Basketball program, they still show substantial benefit to academic interest via athletic success. Elite programs may not spike in interest for 20 or 10 years, but given the incredible spike in interest from lower tier programs, one can assume that interest in schools that are traditional powers is sustained and consistent due in large part to their sustained and consistent success in athletics. One can most easily assume this in sport specific regions such as the South where

college athletics (football in particular) is such a large part of the culture and important to so many students growing up, while in high school, and when choosing a university (Judah, 2010). Taking all these factors into consideration would suggest that perhaps while still very telling the figure below from *University Business Magazine* does not tell the whole story of the impact of athletics has on the interest level of future students.

**Figure 1: Application boosts for tops in sports.**



University Business Magazine. Judah (2010)

## **Texas A&M Football Case Study: Research Conducted by Sean Gregory (2013)**

When discussing the importance of sports on universities one must take a closer look at how the athletes and universities mutually benefit from one another. It has been long debated whether or not top college athletes should be paid, but that argument does not apply to the benefit of the university, instead this portion of the paper will focus primarily on the benefit each side receives from the existence of the other. In order to further highlight this issue, especially on the end of the university, it is worthwhile to explore the long-standing argument that athletes at major universities should be monetarily compensated. The argument of whether or not athletes should be paid will not be discussed, but rather used as a tool to show the importance of athletes to their major universities. With so many reputable and respected sources posing an argument that suggests athletes should have the opportunity to forgo their amateur status and be compensated while participating in NCAA sports, it starts to become clear that the athletes do benefit the university in some ways. If there were no benefit from athletics then it would seem almost unthinkable that so many major and respected sources would have enough evidence to pose a convincing argument for compensation even if the argument is eventually refuted.

In *Time Magazine*'s 2013 article, "Should This Kid be Making \$225,047 a Year for Playing College Football?" several compelling arguments are made by Sean Gregory regarding the compensation of collegiate athletes. Gregory (2013) references statistics such as the three billion dollar deal the Pac-12 Conference signed with ESPN and FOX in 2011. Considering that much of the three billion dollars is directly put back into the twelve schools in the conference, it becomes difficult to dispute that athletics are not having a positive impact on universities, at least on a financial level. With each university receiving millions of dollars from television revenue, it is difficult to measure the entire financial impact student athletes have on universities.

Gregory (2013) uses a former Texas A&M superstar quarterback as an example in his article, but with social media, television, and instant access to information many collegiate athletes across the country have become legitimate celebrities. This celebrity status through sports can impact a university in much the same way any other esteemed graduate or celebrity graduate may benefit his or her alma mater. This benefit can be seen through people that want to give money to the university, interest in the university stemming from interest in the individual and possible donations given back to the university by the individual after he or she leaves. An esteemed and famous graduate is beneficial to a university regardless of how the fame was obtained, assuming it was obtained in a morally and politically appropriate fashion. Superstars, as well as successful teams, attract interest to universities in a variety of ways.

Gregory (2013) also mentions the impact successful football programs have on the college towns' economy. Big games, such as homecoming and rivalry games, bring students and their families, alumni, and community members from the home and visiting teams to town. A team that draws a large crowd requires an active, populated college town to support its fans. The large attendance and financial gain made by the town on game day create a productive cycle that revolves around the university and its football team. Consequently, team pride improves the university and town thus making the ideal college experience more attractive to qualified students, faculty, staff and potential donors. Gregory (2013) drives home this point using Texas A&M football as an example when he mentions that "All kinds of people beyond campus are also making money from this lopsided system. Football game days in particular drive college-town economies. Souvenir hawkers, bars, burger joints, hotels, ticket brokers, stadium vendors, parking attendants and others rely on home games for revenue". According to Gregory's study in 2012 study from Oxford Economics, a global research firm, a season's worth of Texas A&M

home football games generate \$86 million in business for Brazos County, where A&M is located” (p. 36). Again, by the numbers it would be difficult to replace \$86 million into the economy of a university town without a successful athletic program. Admittedly these impressive numbers would only hold true for schools in major BCS level conferences and could only be matched by football programs and possibly a handful of basketball programs. However, if the goal of a top tier team is to win a championship, which is typically the case, then the financial payoff can be similar for any championship level program.

Another point that Gregory (2013) brings up in his article in support of the idea that student athletes should be paid is the amount of publicity these athletes bring to the university. While this paper still does not seek to suggest that student athletes should be paid, it is relevant that many of the same arguments apply to the discussion of how athletics impact a university in a positive manner. One way this is the case (which will be discussed later in greater detail) is through publicity. Fair or not, college superstars have become celebrities on many levels. Kansas basketball 2013 freshman Andrew Wiggins left high school having already been on the cover of magazines such as *Sports Illustrated* and at 17 years old was a legitimate, well-known figure. The afore mentioned Texas A&M received nonstop coverage from news and media outlets spanning much further than just sports sources, thanks to their former quarterback Johnny Manziel. These accomplished athletes bring reporters, cameras, and exposure to their school, essentially accounting for much of the universities’ advertisement and exposure that might otherwise cost millions of dollars.

As suggested by Gregory (2013), using sports to gain exposure for a university is not a new concept. Gregory (2013) mentions that “The Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862 and post-Civil War industrialization sparked the U.S.'s unique obsession with college sports” (p. 6).

“As large public institutions spread into sparsely populated states, the competition for students grew fierce” (p. 2) says Allen Sack, a business professor at the University of New Haven in West Haven, Connecticut, who has written extensively on college sports history. “A new sport, a bastardized version of soccer and rugby that was uniquely American--football--happened to be catching on at this time, and it emerged as a tool to draw students, and spectators, to campuses” (Sack, 2014). In other words, right or wrong, universities have benefited from the exposure of successful athletic departments since as early as the 1800s and continue to do so today.

## Field Research

### How Athletes Benefit From Athletic Departments: NCAA Research

In 2007, the NCAA released the results of intensive and thorough research that sought to measure the value of athletics in universities. The research covered financial impact but also served as an in-depth study of the student athlete and how athletics impacted their own college experience (Brown, 2007). While it is quite true that the NCAA would have a dog in this fight, so to speak, the results of the research were difficult to refute, as the vast majority of areas researched came back overwhelmingly supportive of the theory that athletics benefits both the student athletes and the universities as a whole. While Brown's (2007) research is somewhat dated, it is the most recent research done at such an in-depth and national level for all revenue-producing and non-revenue-producing sports in both major and minor athletic departments. Since 2007, the same basic structure of the NCAA remains and the same power sports are producing revenue at a similar rate, if not higher, rendering the results valid even years later.

In his article "Research Validates Value, and Values, of Athletics" Gary Brown of the *NCAA News* discusses the results of the 2007 research and what they mean to college athletics. Brown opens his article matter-of-factly and unapologetically, immediately revealing some of the most telling and important results of the research pertaining specifically to how the student athlete benefits from his or her situation as he opens with:

"The percentages speak for themselves:

Eighty-eight percent of student-athletes earn their degrees.



Eighty-three percent of student-athletes have positive feelings about their choice of major.

Ninety-one percent of former Division I student-athletes have full-time jobs, and on average, their income levels are higher than non-student-athletes.

Twenty-seven percent of former Division I student-athletes go on to earn a postgraduate degree.

Falsehood? Fabrication? Fiction?

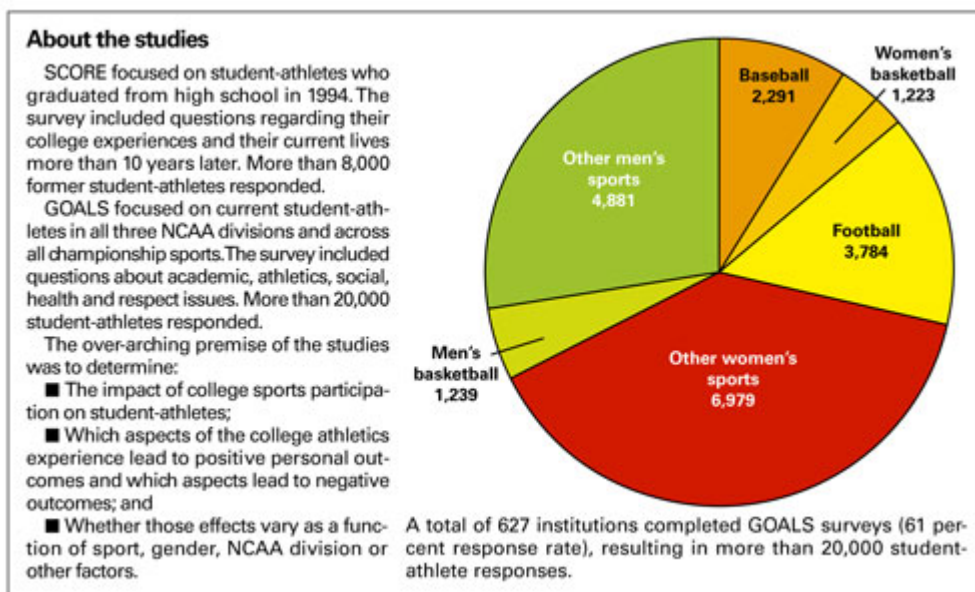
Fact, actually” (Brown, 2007).

These numbers and the bulk of Brown’s (2007) research do not necessarily reflect the impact the student athletes have on the university, but rather the impact that the sports themselves have on the student athletes. Some might argue that the student athlete being benefited does not equate to the university being benefited, but the student athlete makes up a large part of the student body and improving their experience would be improving the university as a whole. Brown’s (2007) numbers also state that athletes are more likely to find work after graduation, which improves the name and reputation of the school. At major universities, the top athletes could potentially sign major deals in professional leagues, earning the university a multitude of free and positive publicity. So while much of the study focuses on how the athlete benefits from sports, it stands to reason that the successful athlete improves a university.

The graduation rate, satisfaction rate, employment rate, and graduate school rate among athletes show across the board a more successful student in the classroom than the average non-athlete. Student athletes are successfully graduating, finding jobs, and representing their

universities in a positive manner in an undeniably consistent and successful rate at over ninety percent employment and nearly ninety percent graduation rate. It has been discussed in this paper the impact famous professional athletes can have on their alma maters from both a publicity and financial stand point; however, it is also well-documented that the vast majority of student athletes do not go on to play their sport professionally and, consequently, must rely on their academic experience to succeed in a post-graduate career. Figure 2 courtesy of *The NCAA News* (Brown, 2007) illustrate how athletics impacts academics in a positive manner for NCAA athletes.

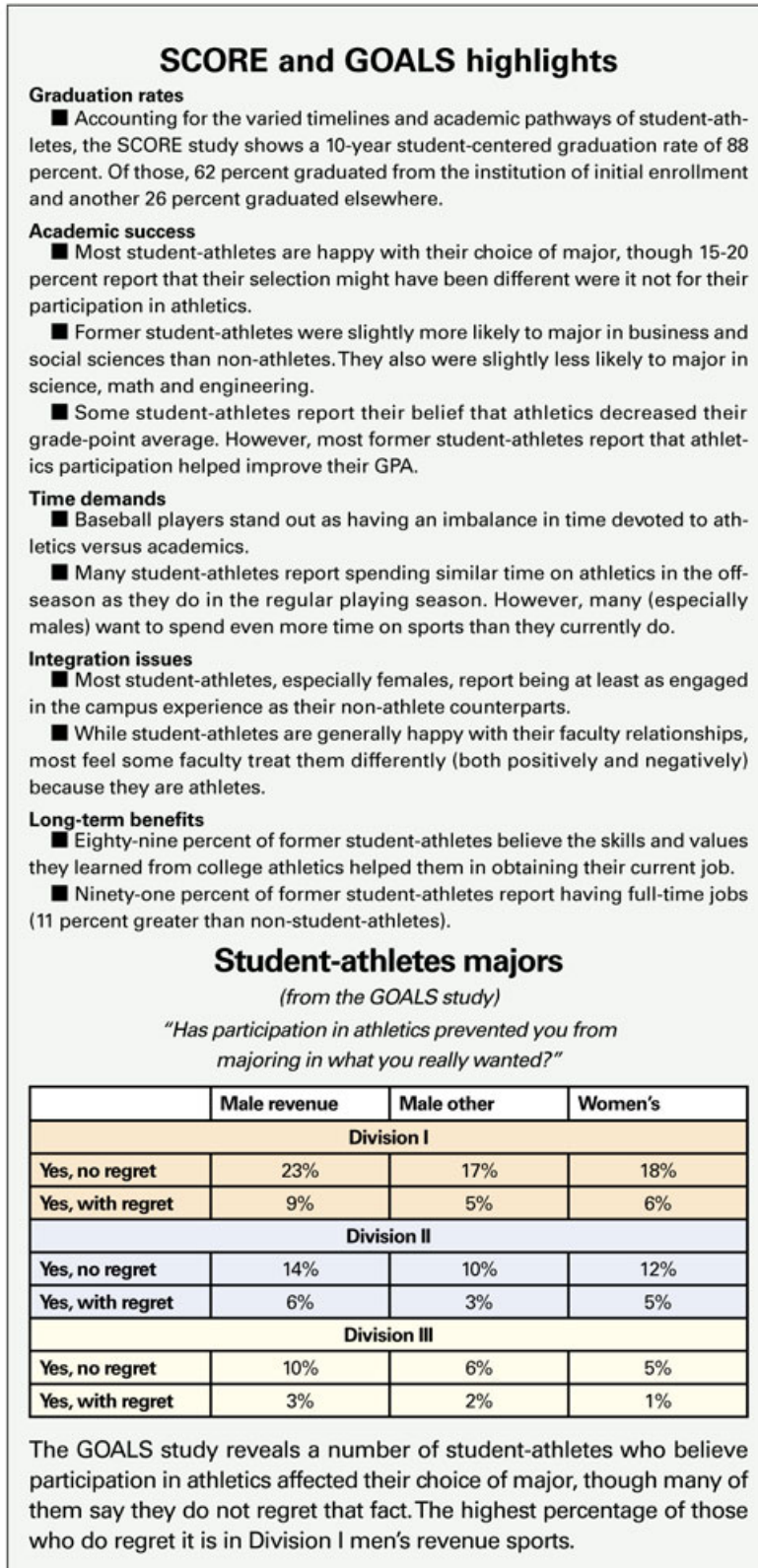
**Figure 2.1: SCORE and GOALS survey**



The above pie chart, in response to a survey conducted in 2007, simply shows the diversity of athletes used to come to the results shown in Figure 2.2 below. The student athletes and former student athletes included in the survey were enrolled in college anytime between 1994 and 2007. The purpose of using current athletes, as well as athletes from over a decade earlier, was to show

whether the results would stand the test of time and athletes' positive feelings toward their experience would remain the same. While the top tier football and basketball programs benefit the universities on a financial and public exposure level, they are still far from the only programs in an athletic department and this research shows the benefit other student athletes have received from their university's athletic department.

Figure 2.2: SCORE and GOALS survey



The SCORE and GOALS (Brown, 2007) research shows a graduation rate of 88 percent among student athletes in the NCAA. This number alone speaks great volumes to how the student athlete benefits from an athletic department. Certainly one can assume that many of these student athletes would have been successful academically without athletics, but the academic support provided to athletes through mandatory study halls, academic advisors, tutors and a watchful eye from coaches and administrators have certainly attributed to the 88 percent graduation rate. The fact that so many athletes are finishing school demonstrates that they are setting themselves up for success beyond the classroom. As it would be naïve to give all the credit of such an outstanding graduation rate (higher than the average non athlete) so too would it be naïve to completely dismiss the strenuous expectations of a successful athletic department as having nothing to do with these exceptional numbers.

One may also dismiss this as evidence that an athletic department hurts a university because the athletes are receiving extra attention and mentorship that non-athletes may not have access. In response to this argument, two things must be taken into consideration. First, consider that most of the academic facilities and employees involved in major, revenue-producing athletic departments are possible and funded directly by revenue produced by the athletic department and generous donations given by supporters of the athletic department. Secondly, consider that many universities offer very similar resources in facilities and academic help to non-athletes as they do to athletes. The difference is that athletes are under a watchful eye of coaches and administrators and are required to take advantage of the resources that a non-athlete might otherwise not see the value of which to take advantage.

Like any program, there will be some individuals in athletics who benefit less than others and some that feel participating in the program was a negative experience. As shown numerous

times in these studies that justify the academic impact of athletics from all angles, the vast majority of athletes benefit academically from their athletic experience, stating that they felt athletics improved their GPA. If there were to be a department within a university that contributed to significant financial gain, publicity, media exposure and was also guaranteed to positively impact the GPA of a majority of its students, it seems it would take very little convincing to get this program passed by a school board that has the best interest of the university in mind. For this reason, athletic departments and larger universities nearly always form a symbiotic relationship with one another.

The fear of athletes being isolated and treated differently than their non-athlete counterparts is also discussed in Brown's (2007) research. While it is true that top athletes in the top schools receive a certain amount of fame that make a normal college experience nearly impossible, the vast majority of college athletes are still able to integrate and participate normally in academic- and school-sponsored activities and do so at a rate equal to, and at times better than, non-athletes on campus. Brown's (2007) research study reports that most athletes, especially females, find themselves at least as engaged in the campus experience as non-athletes. The athlete engagement factor can possibly be attributed to the fact that the campus experience in so many major universities revolves around athletic functions. A campus culture and identity is so often determined by not only an academic reputation but also a social and communal experience. While it is difficult to conduct a study based purely on statistics to measure a social and communal experience, it is difficult to refute that an entire campus filled with school colors and the encouragement of united students on a Fall Saturday on so many campuses across the country does anything but contribute positively to a sense of community and school spirit.

Perhaps the most telling result of Brown's (2007) research conducted by the NCAA is the fact that 91 percent of former student athletes are employed, 11 percent higher than non-athletes (Figure 2.2). Eighty-nine percent of former athletes reported that lessons they learned in their collegiate athletic careers have helped them in obtaining their current jobs (Figure 2.2). These statistics provide evidence to the theory that collegiate athletics help students succeed even after graduation. Of course, 11 percent is no small number when considering how much more likely a former student athlete is to gain employment immediately following school than a non-athlete. Again, the vast majority of these athletes are not playing their sports professionally, nor are they receiving any level of fame that would give them any advantage in an interview process. Athletes simply go into the work force more prepared on average than their non-athlete counterparts, due in no small part to their experience in athletics.

While much of the research conducted by Brown (2007) demonstrates how athletic departments benefit the athletes themselves, Figure 2.2 illustrates that participation in athletics does not negatively impact an academic experience for nearly all student athletes. Division I male athletes were impacted negatively more than any other division level, as nine percent reported regret in the sense that sports prevented them from majoring in what they would have otherwise wanted (Figure 2.2). While 91 percent of Division I male student athletes have no regret about the major they chose, it would be ideal if that number were higher at the highest level of collegiate athletics (Figure 2.2). At all other levels, however, the regret rate in majors changed due to the fact that participation in athletics runs at about four percent. With only four percent majoring in something that they would rather not be in, 96 percent of non-Division I male athletes are majoring in a study with no regret despite participating in athletics (Figure 2.2).

Given an athletic schedule that demands practice, time, and class schedules that are often not flexible, this number is encouraging to student athletes balancing both academics and athletics.

While there will always be ongoing arguments regarding collegiate athlete compensation and whether the NCAA takes advantage of its student athletes, the cited figures and research prove that student athletes as a whole benefit significantly from participation in a university's athletic department. From campus involvement to academic success to post graduate employment, athletes have proven to be as successful as, if not more successful, on average than their non-athlete counterparts. If the concern is that student athletes somehow miss out on the full college experience and would be better off without their athletic involvement, then the numbers in Brown's (2007) research show emphatically that the opposite is, in fact, true. The aforementioned statistics only show the measurable part of the experience, as many student athletes develop a greater magnitude of qualities like work ethic, confidence, and lifelong relationships due to their participation in athletics. Any way one examines the results of the research, it is clear that the vast majority of student athletes are better off for having been a part of a university athletic department than they would have been otherwise.



## **University of Alabama Swimming and Diving Case Study**

In order to accurately measure the impact a thriving athletic department has on a university as a whole, consider the impact the athletic department has on its student athletes. This impact factor can be measured in the same manner as how the department has an impact on the university as a whole, in the sense that it can be felt through financial gain, an appeal to the ethos of a group, and exposure to build a brand. A sense of community and purpose are common benefits that athletes have been known to emphasize on all levels. Like any club, program, or institution put in place to benefit its members, there are people who have negative experiences, however, the vast majority of college athletes feel that their college experience was enhanced through participation in athletics in a number of ways. To examine several benefits that may come as a result of the athlete's college experience, take a closer look at the University of Alabama Men's and Women's Swim and Dive Team. This particular team was chosen because it comes from one of the most premiere and highest revenue-producing athletic departments in the United States, yet they are often overlooked as a non-revenue producing team. This unique combination offers a balanced perspective coming from the 74 students athletes that make up the program.

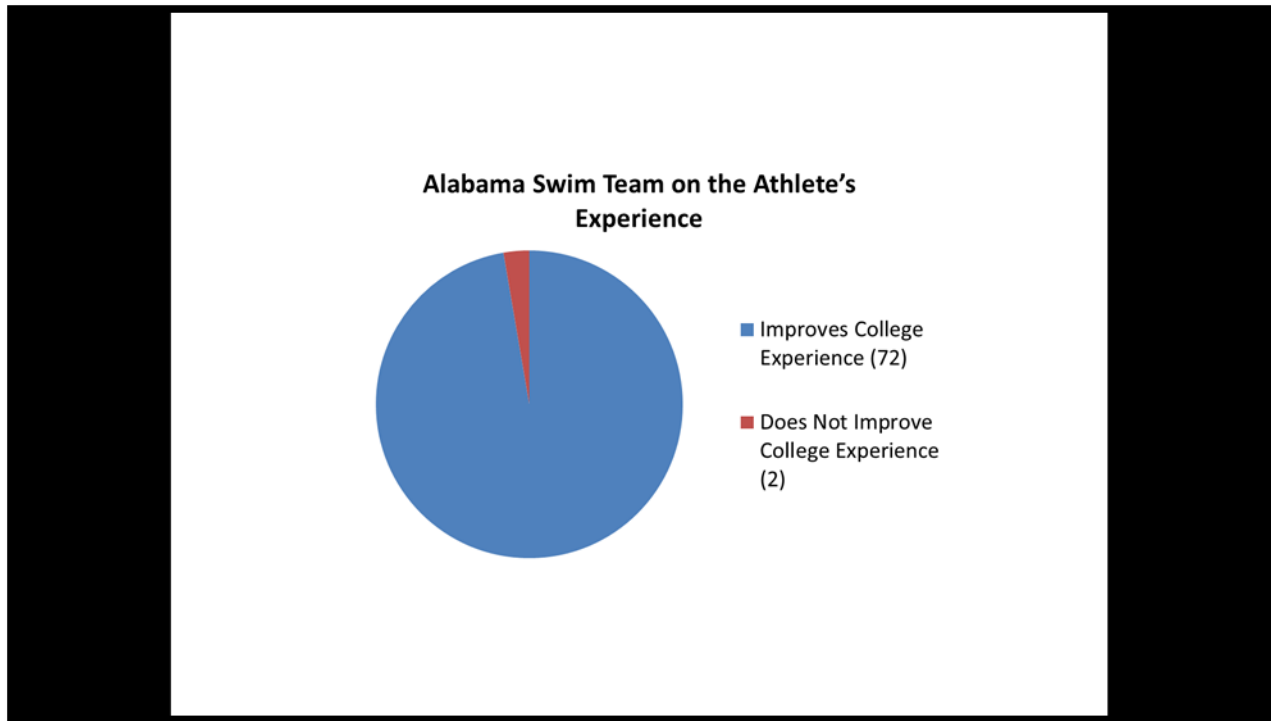
Due to the fact that most financial and brand-building benefits of sports are measurable through numbers and statistical research, the research conducted on the University of Alabama Swim and Dive Team focused mostly on the emotional and communal benefit of the college athlete experience. If it can be accepted that college athletics are overwhelmingly positive for the athletes themselves, then it should be much more readily accepted that it can be beneficial to a university as well. Students that are a part of a team immediately have access to a support system and group of like-minded individuals looking to succeed in the classroom and on the

playing field. To have the support of people that are understanding of similar schedules, expectations, and goals is helpful in any setting including a university classroom. One could certainly argue that the influence of a team of young college students could be negative on an academic career, but Brown's (2007) research conducted by the NCAA suggests that just the opposite is true for the vast majority of college athletes. The research conducted through personal surveys and interviews with the University of Alabama Swim and Dive Team rendered results that suggest the same things as Brown's (2007) research, at times rendering even more lopsided results.

While given the opportunity to sit with several of the athletes on the Alabama Swim and Dive Team to get a good feel for the impact, positive or negative, that being a part of the athletic department has had on their academic success and college experience, an overwhelming response of gratitude and positive feelings toward the opportunity they had through swimming resulted in response to the given survey. The experience was described by athletes as having "changed my entire college experience for the better. I don't think I would have nearly as many opportunities or be as successful in the opportunities I currently have if it weren't for my college swimming career." Other members of the team described their experience as "beneficial in every way" and "allowing me to be on track to graduate in a way that I may never have been able to without swimming." Of the twenty plus swimmers interviewed, not a single one said that their academic success, campus involvement, or overall college experience was negatively impacted by their involvement with swimming. As seen in Figure 3.1 below, nearly the entire 74-person team agreed with these sentiments. It should also be noted that the athletes were told their responses would be completely anonymous, so no athlete had any reason to give anything other than the truth in their responses. Figure 3.1 provides an answer to the most basic, yet most

important question in regards to an athletic department impacting a university: Are the athletes themselves benefiting in their college experience because of their role in the athletic department? For the University of Alabama Swim and Dive Team the answer was an overwhelming yes.

**Figure 3.1: University of Alabama satisfaction survey**

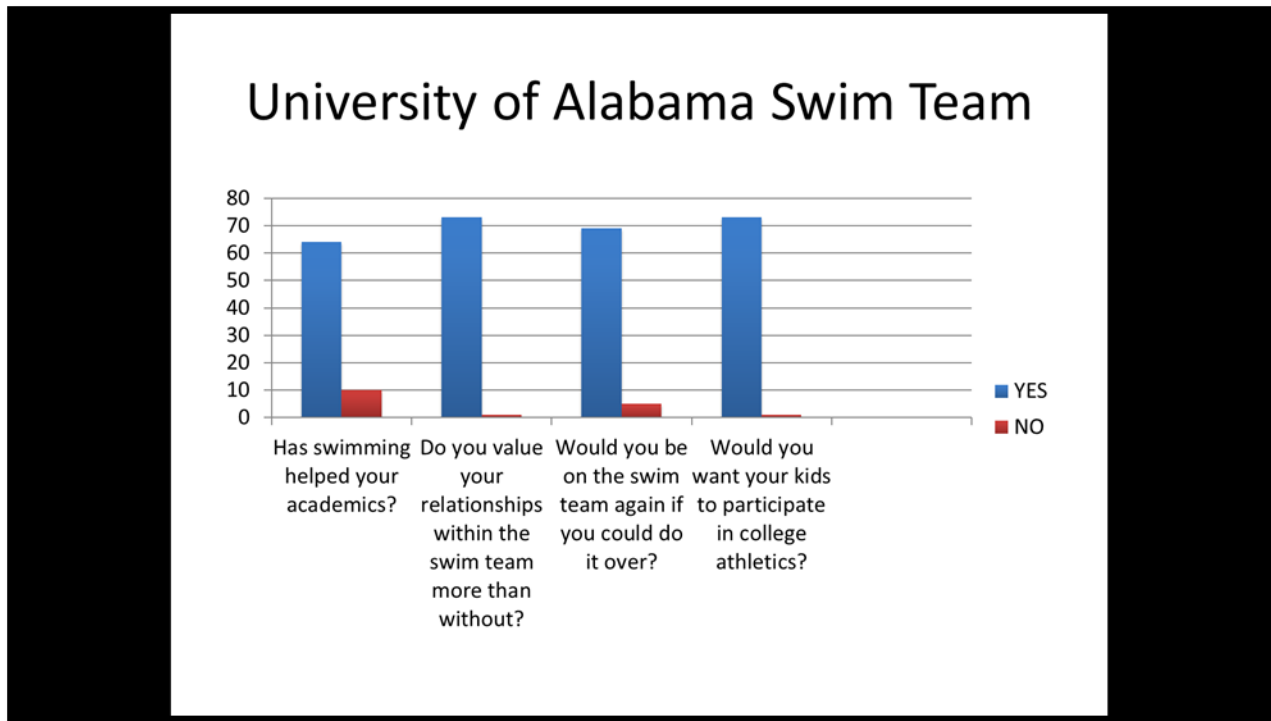


With 97 percent of the surveyed athletes describing their experience with their university's athletic department as beneficial to their overall college experience, it is clear that just as Brown's (2007) research suggested the goal of the athletic department in improving the college experience of its student athletes has been overwhelming success. The positive sentiments student athletes feel toward their experience in their athletic departments was consistent across all sports male and female at every level in the NCAA in 2007 and has stayed

that way to an even higher degree for the non-revenue-producing Alabama Swimming and Diving Team in an athletic department that was the second highest revenue-producing department in the NCAA in 2012 behind only the University of Texas (Burnsed, 2013).

Twenty-four personal interviews were conducted with various Alabama swimmers in order to get a better idea for the impact the experience has had on them, but in addition to the interviews, a very brief and straight-forward survey was given to the entire team of 74 athletes. Just as the interview results were nothing but positive and often passionate responses to the value that college athletics has had on each individual, the survey results showed extraordinarily positive responses to every question asked regard the college athlete’s experience. The results of the simple and straight-forward survey can be seen in Figure 3.2 below.

**Figure 3.2: University of Alabama satisfaction survey**



When asked if swimming has been beneficial to their academics, 64 of the 74 surveyed athletes said that it has. It is important to note that the question does not ask if it has been beneficial or had no impact at all, meaning that 86 percent of the athletes agreed that they actually performed better in the classroom due to their time on the swim team. The athletes accounted for their classroom performance due to the mandatory study hall hours the team must adhere to on a weekly basis, the expectations and standards put on by the coaching staff, and the motivation of being awarded on a national level like Academic All-American awards. With academics being the number one priority at any university, these results show a positive correlation between athletic and academic success.

One core value that is mentioned over and over again when discussing the benefit of athletics is that of teamwork. The benefits of sharing a common goal and being able to work with people go beyond just emotional and communal support, but also prepare a student athlete for nearly any career field that requires one to work with other people. The sentiments among athletes in the survey show that they felt this advantage strongly during their swimming career, as nearly every athlete found they had close and positive relationships with their teammates. Of the interviewed athletes nearly all of them also felt that these positive relationships would help them with their careers after college.

Perhaps the most telling results of the short survey were the answers to the following questions: “Would you swim if you could do it over again” and “would you want your kids to participate in college athletics?” All but one athlete would want their kids to participate in college athletics. This sentiment suggests that either they had a positive experience or believe the experience would be positive for most people. Like the NCAA study (Brown, 2007) every question posed to the athletes was answered with great conviction that having an athletic

department in their university and being a part of it was extraordinarily beneficial to their college experience.

## **Strategic Benefits of Adding a Football Program: A Study by Dixon and Kelly (1995)**

While the purpose of the research, literature review, and commentary in this paper is to discuss athletic departments as a whole, it is no secret that major football programs attract the most attention and bring in financial benefit, media exposure, social events, school pride, and a sense of community unlike any other sport, program, or event in college. For this reason it is important to look at the benefits a football program, in particular, can bring to a university. Although many universities do not have a football program and football programs at the Division II and Division III levels do not have the same impact as programs on the Division I level, it is still important to consider the major impact football has on universities across the country.

Darren Kelly and Marlene Dixon (1995) do a thorough job outlining all the benefits of a successful Division I football program to a university in their article written for *The Journal of Intercollegiate Sports* entitled “The Strategic Benefits of Adding Football for NCAA Division I Institutions.” The basis for Kelly and Dixon’s (1995) paper is an investigation of several universities that were in the process of adding football programs while the article was being written. The article found that while all the universities studied found it beneficial to add a football program, the reasons for each individual institution for doing so varied greatly from one to the other. These results, as Kelly and Dixon (1995) mention, suggest that there are several ways in which a university can benefit from a football program, and different universities can use these benefits in different ways. Kelly and Dixon (1995) also investigate universities with established football programs to better understand why the institutions adding programs are doing so and attain tangible evidence of the benefits actually paying off and outweighing the often times extraordinarily large financial sacrifices necessary to get such a large program off the ground.

Before even beginning to investigate the reasons behind adding a football program, it should be established that the overwhelming majority of university leaders and decision-makers can agree upon the benefits for larger universities to have a competitive football program. This can be evidenced simply through the fact that there are currently 125 Division I FBS and 122 Division 1 FCS football programs in the country. With the exception of a few schools (Cal State Fullerton being the largest with 30,049 undergrad students) most large state universities across the country field a football team at some level (Kelly and Dixon, 1995). Even with this being the case, one could certainly still argue that having an athletic department and a football program in particular, is a mistake if one supports the well-being of the university. One cannot argue, however, that if a football program is a mistake, it is a mistake that nearly every large state university across the country seems to somehow not be picking up on.

While not many major university leaders seem to think a football program is a mistake, Kelly and Dixon's (1995) research seems to suggest that several (in particular the universities in the process of creating a football program) do see the benefits in such a way that they are willing to put a great deal of time, resources, and effort into creating one. Kelly and Dixon (1995) mention that their research has shown that universities have recently spent up to \$65,000 just to contract consulting companies to conduct football feasibility studies. This number does not even include the salaries and time of paid employees and board members that conduct their own research, meetings, and education to come up with a conclusion as to whether or not a football program is a move in the right direction. In other words, university leaders have concluded that it is worth salaries, time, consulting, research and thousands upon thousands of dollars not to establish a football program, but just to decide whether or not it is the right choice to do so. As Dixon and Kelly (1995) point out "clearly the effort and investment required to explore adding



football during this economic climate shows that some university trustees, presidents, and other influential parties see football as a potential asset that can benefit the entire institution” (p. 287). As Kelly and Dixon (1995) report, the most influential people in universities see football as potentially so beneficial that it is worth a great deal of sacrifice to create.

The research conducted by Kelly and Dixon (1995) focused on six Division I FCS schools that were in the process of adding football to the schools’ athletic department; Cleveland State University in Cleveland, OH (Carnegie = Doctoral/Research Universities), Georgia State University in Atlanta, GA (Carnegie = Research Universities), University of South Alabama (South Alabama or USA) in Mobile, AL (Carnegie = Master’s Colleges and Universities), Old Dominion University (ODU) in Norfolk, VA (Carnegie = Research Universities), The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC Charlotte; Carnegie = Doctoral/Research Universities) and The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA; Carnegie = Master’s Colleges and Universities). Perhaps the most telling aspect of the schools Kelly and Dixon (1995) used for their research was not that they all decided establishing a football program was worth the cost, but that nearly every one of the individual universities gave different reasons for why they thought the benefits of adding football outweighed the costs. Of all the reasons to add a football program given by university leaders, the ideas of student recruitment, media exposure, and increased prestige were mentioned more often than any others. These three concepts have all been outlined through the course of this paper, and given the number of university leaders and officials that have used them as the cornerstone reasons for establishing a football program, one can assume that a football program would make a significant positive impact in all three areas. More interest from potential students, exposure in the media, and a means to add prestige to a university name all have the potential to make money for a university. The biggest hurdle in

starting a football program is typically the financial strain. Facilities, salaries for administrators, coaches, trainers, managers, equipment, scholarships, recruiting expenses, operations expenses and countless other expenses that come up throughout the season can cost a university millions of dollars annually to establish and keep a football program running. Many schools will never earn this money back based off of what the football program brings in on its own. This being the case it must first be determined that the football program will bring in enough money to collectively make any financial loss worth it for the entire well-being of the university. The presidents, trustees, and board members make all decisions based upon what is best for their university to provide the best academic service to its students as it possibly can. A competent board of trustees will only establish a football program if it meets whatever criteria is established to best improve the academic experience of a university.

Kelly and Dixon (1995) mention a survey done by Old Dominion University that revealed that over 80 percent of participants felt that football would “enhance ODU’s ability to recruit students and student athletes”. Obviously not everyone in our country is a sports fan. Our nation, however, clearly has a strong relationship with its sports and our country’s most popular sport is football. The fans of the sport show an allegiance at the high school, college and professional levels. Many major universities also attract non-football fans with their football program simply because of the social spectacle football games and events have the potential to cause. This spectacle need not take away from the academic experience of a university, but especially for six Saturdays of the year it can greatly enhance the social and communal experience of college. This experience is one that many students consider when choosing a university straight out of high school. While the academic reputation of a university should be the number one factor when choosing a university for a young student, that person must realize

that he or she will be spending the next four years of his or her life at this place and consequently must consider all areas of the university including academic, social, location, and culture – many of which a strong football program can directly influence. If the football program strongly influences many of these areas, then one can conclude that the student recruitment and attraction of potential students can be greatly impacted as well. Student athletes and non-athletes alike can benefit from the sense of community, the stronger facilities, the outside interest and typical influx of booster donations. If a potential student can see and realize all these benefits, then football could be a strong enough recruiting tool that this factor alone makes the cost of establishing a football team worth the cost to many university officials.

All three of the main factors mentioned by the six schools studied by Kelly and Dixon (1995) can be linked together. The idea of media exposure, for instance, has the ability to directly and significantly impact both student recruitment and the prestige of the university. From the internet to TV to social media, exposure is everything in business and establishing a name for one's self and attracting the top high school students in the country is no different. In order to make the news, a university must first do something news worthy. Especially for the high school generation, one of the most news worthy subjects in our nation, right or wrong, is sports. Among the most popular sports is football and among the most popular leagues in football is the NCAA. With the popularity of NCAA football in our country, establishing a Division I NCAA football program is reason for a great deal of media coverage and exposure. Establishing a winning program, attracting fans, winning championships, and consistently being a winning program brings even more reason for a university to attract media coverage. While the media would focus on the football program, it gives the university an opportunity to showcase itself as a whole. Commercial spots during TV games, showcasing campus to fans and visitors

during home games, advertising at games and leading up to games are all ways that a single football game can bring more media exposure and help a school in more ways than almost any other single event.

The idea of increased prestige is a concept that drives all university leaders. An academic and social reputation is what brings in students, funding and resources. Prestige can be gained through rigorous entrance requirements, distinguished alumni, state of the art facilities, or an accomplished faculty and staff. Most of the aforementioned ways to build prestige can take a great deal of time. Academic and social reputation can take decades to build up to be one of the top competitive universities in the nation. A successful football program on the other hand has the potential to be competitive at the highest level within only a few seasons if it has proper resources and support. While the prestige given to a school by a strenuous academic reputation and distinguished alumni is what all universities strive for, it can be argued that the prestige given by a competitive football program has the potential to bring significantly more exposure and attention to the university as a whole. Many people outside the world of academia often relate a university's notoriety with the amount of exposure they receive in the media and how the media portrays them. Late in the Fall, college football often takes up nearly all of a university's national media coverage and the better a team is doing the more positive that coverage seems to be. With positive media coverage, it then becomes significantly easier to get the public to buy into a university as a whole hence improving its reputation and giving the school a greater sense of prestige.

Through the research of Kelly and Dixon (1995) on specific schools, one could see that while the three main motivations of starting a football program were consistently prestige, recruitment, and exposure, there were also specific reasons that each university's leaders had that

were unique to their establishment. For instance, Kelly and Dixon (1995) found that the University of South Alabama President had the mindset that even things like a university band (which would receive massive amounts of exposure from a football program) would benefit the university a great deal. The President said that the band and football program “would serve as a catalyst for a wide range of student life activities, from tailgating to homecoming to any number of related experiences.” Dixon and Kelly (1995) would go on to quote Cleveland State leaders as saying “football presents the opportunity to provide an enhanced student experience and create an engaged community of students, faculty, staff, alumni and external community members.” In response to these findings, Kelly and Dixon (1995) felt that “Essentially these schools felt that football would enhance student life on campus and also draw alumni and people from the surrounding community to the university (at least on football game days). This enhancement was viewed as a way to make their university more residential and thereby more attractive to nonlocal students.” Different leaders of different universities have all stated different reasons as to why a football program would benefit them, but they can all agree that in one way or another there is a benefit to adding a program explaining the multiple schools that add to the hundreds of already existing programs every year; a trend that can be seen most clearly in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4**  
**Colleges and Universities That Have Added or Plan To Add Football**  
**Programs Between 2004–2014**

School	Location	Level	First Season
Anna Maria College	Paxton, MA	NCAA Division III	2009
Becker College	Leicester, MA	NCAA Division III	2005
Birmingham-Southern College	Birmingham, AL	NCAA Division III	2007
Campbell University	Buies Creek, NC	NCAA Division I—FCS	2008
Castleton State College	Castleton, VT	NCAA Division III	2009
Cleveland State University	Cleveland, OH	NCAA Division I—FCS	2012
Colorado State Univ.—Pueblo	Pueblo, CO	NCAA Division II	2008
Concordia University Ann Arbor	Ann Arbor, MI	NAIA	2010
Dordt College	Sioux Center, IA	NAIA	2008
Finlandia University	Hancock, MI	NCAA Division III	2012
Gallaudet University	Washington, DC	NCAA Division III	2007
Georgia State University	Atlanta, GA	NCAA Division I—FCS	2010
Grand View University	Des Moines, IA	NAIA	2008
Hendrix College	Conway, AR	NCAA Division III	TBD
Kentucky Christian University	Grayson, KY	NAIA	2008
LaGrange College	LaGrange, GA	NCAA Division III	2006
Lake Erie College	Painesville, OH	NCAA Division II	2008
Lamar University	Beaumont, TX	NCAA Division I—FCS	2010
LeMoyne-Owen College	Memphis, TN	NCAA Division II	2011
Lincoln University	Oxford, PA	NCAA Division II	2009
Lindsey Wilson College	Columbia, KY	NAIA	2010
Marian College	Indianapolis, IN	NAIA	2007
North Carolina Wesleyan	Rocky Mount, NC	NCAA Division III	2005
Notre Dame College	South Euclid, OH	NAIA	2009
Old Dominion University	Norfolk, VA	NCAA Division I—FCS	2009
Pacific University	Forest Grove, OR	NCAA Division III	2010
Presentation College	Aberdeen, SD	NCAA Division III	2011
Seton Hill University	Greensburg, PA	NCAA Division II	2005
St. Vincent College	Latrobe, PA	NCAA Division III	2006
Stevenson University	Owings Mills, MD	NCAA Division III	2010
SUNY Maritime College	New York, NY	NCAA Division III	2006
The College of St. Scholastica	Duluth, MN	NCAA Division III	2008
Univ. of Texas at San Antonio	San Antonio, TX	NCAA Division I—FCS	2011
University of New Haven	West Haven, CT	NCAA Division II	2009
Univ. of North Carolina at Charlotte	Charlotte, NC	NCAA Division I—FCS	2013
University of North Carolina at Pembroke	Pembroke, NC	NCAA Division II	2007
University of South Alabama	Mobile, AL	NCAA Division I—FCS	2010
University of the Incarnate Word	San Antonio, TX	NCAA Division II	2009
Stetson University	Deland, FL	NCAA Division I	2013

Dixon and Kelly (1995), along with the university leaders that they interviewed felt that football could “enhance the perception of the school as a “real university” in the eyes of consumers, potential students, and the community at-large.” It was also very well-documented, however, that this “enhanced perception” did not come without cost or risk. One could argue that

the high cost and risk makes starting a football program that may or may not be successful an investment that just is not worth it. On the other hand it could be argued that with so many universities already having and planning to start football programs despite the great risk involved, the pay off of a successful program must indeed be great. No matter how one looks at it though, there is no denying that starting a collegiate football program comes with a great deal of sacrifice. As Dixon and Kelly (1995) put it “Universities that are pondering the addition of football to their athletic programs must proceed cautiously, carefully, and have a true strategic direction guiding their decision”.

The risks in adding a football team can be seen most clearly in the financial costs that were previously discussed in this paper. Salaries for all staff, facilities, equipment etc. can bring a great deal of financial burden to a university. Despite success or media exposure, many schools do not see any financial gain in adding a football program. For this reason tuition could be raised, salaries could be cut, and other sacrifices might have to be made in order to get a football program started. If financial success is not in the short term plan then university leaders will have to determine that the benefits outlined above will outweigh the costs, and for many universities this may not always be the case, but for others still, the advantages and benefits of a football program are worth the initial financial strain. The increased fees and decreased salaries etc. can be a major concern to faculty and students alike, and while the number one reason to start a football program is to benefit these people, it must first be determined that it is both what they would want and what would be most beneficial to their overall educational experience. In order to do this Dixon and Kelly (1995) point out that it is imperative that university leaders consider the input of these groups in the decision process and do not try to “keep up with the Jones’s,” but rather make a carefully researched decision that they feel will benefit their individual institution

with its unique needs. Once this is determined then it has been found that hundreds of schools have gone on to develop a strong football program with a great deal of success and a strong return on their initially costly investment.



## **Opposing Point of View**

### **Potential Pitfalls of Having a Major NCAA Football Program: Addressing A Forbes Article by Steven Salzberg**

In his article entitled “Get Football Out of Our Universities” for *Forbes Magazine*, Steven Salzberg (2011) points out several issues that having a major football program in a university can bring. This paper would be remiss to not address some of the issues Salzberg (2011) raises. This being said, even Salzberg (2011), an adamant opponent of major college football acknowledges several times that an athletic department that does not take away from an educational experience and focus is beneficial to a university. Despite bringing up several legitimate and viable arguments against major football programs, Salzberg (2011) agrees with the premise of this thesis that athletic departments benefit universities. Given the prominent role football plays in many university athletic departments, as well as the idea that many people in academia may share the viewpoints of Salzberg (2011), it is important that his arguments made against a football program are addressed.

Salzberg (2011) is never secretive in his passionate appeal that eliminating college football all together is without question the best option. Early on in his article he states that major college football is “undermining our education system and hurting our competitiveness in technology, science, and engineering.” He goes on to explain that we need to “eliminate football entirely from our universities if we want to maintain our pre-eminent position as the world’s scientific and technological leader” (p. 24). While this way of thinking seems quite radical, the

core of it is difficult to argue. If football truly did interfere with educational endeavors at a university and the only way to remedy this issue was to eliminate the program all together then Salzberg (2011) is justified in his way of thinking.

The issue however is that Salzberg (2011), perhaps because it would be nearly impossible to do, gives almost no evidence for his claim. It is true that major college football programs require a great deal of attention from staff and students alike. It is also true that these football programs often become the center of attention on campus during the Fall. But one could also argue that theater and other forms of entertainment would take the place of football Saturdays if abolished. The cultural and historical relevance of many forms of entertainment such as theater and music certainly outweighs that of football, but the worldwide industry of athletics is one that is just as large, and based off of Salzberg's (2011) arguments that football takes away from the ultimate goal of a university of preparing its students for the real world, one would be hard pressed to find another form of entertainment that is a significantly bigger global market than athletics and a bigger national market than football. Salzberg (2011) points out that "the core mission of our universities is to educate our students, not to entertain them with big-time sports events." With most students being between the ages of 18-22, it is fairly unreasonable to expect that academics be the sole source of interest and not expect students to seek entertainment elsewhere.

Using a platform like football to fill this void of entertainment allows a university to still keep a sense of community and have social and economical impact on the university and town. It is of the utmost importance that university leaders decide before erecting a football program that it will simply fill this entertainment void and not take away from the main goal of the university of educating its students. Once university leaders go through due diligence to

determine that this is the case then it is somewhat out of bounds to assume otherwise without any evidence that this is the case.

In an attempt to prove that the financial gain of a successful football program can be replaced, Salzberg (2011) is again adamant when he states the following: “Football makes a profit, some claim. To that I would say, so what? Universities could make a profit running a casino too – should they do that? If football is so profitable, then spin off the teams as private corporations, and let them pay the university a licensing fee to use the university logo. But let’s stop pretending they have anything to do with education.” The problem with Salzberg’s (2011) claims is that they are built on several assumptions. First off, he is correct in saying that major programs are more of a business than anything, but it is a proven business model that at the highest level positively impacts a university financially. On top of being a proven business model it does many things that a casino could not. It promotes recruitment interest, builds a sense of community and gives students something to rally behind, and to compare any of these benefits to a casino borders on irrational.

Salzberg’s (2011) claim that we need to stop pretending football has anything to do with education can only be directed toward a very small minority. Not many advocates of college football claim that it has anything to do with education directly, but rather that it compliments it. Giving students an alternative from the rigors of school work and the pressure of social settings, football simply gives students another option in which they can get away from the other aspects of schooling. If football took up a significant amount of time for the average student then an argument could be made that it was detrimental to the student body, but aside from three hours for twelve Saturdays of the year the average student is not investing much time into its university’s football program.

Another issue that Salzburg (2011) discusses in his article is that there is entirely too much effort spent on a very small group of male students. Salzburg (2011) feels that “all of this effort goes to the care and feeding of a very small number of (exclusively) male students, most of whom get a poor education” (p. 54). This way of thinking also presents several viewpoints that are potentially difficult to defend. First of all, Salzburg (2011) is suggesting that the educational pursuits of the young men on football scholarships are not worth investing resources into. While an argument could be made that more worthy candidates are available to invest resources into, it walks a very thin line to suggest that the ones chosen somehow do not deserve any effort. He also makes the statement that the education received by these young men is often inadequate; a statement that seemingly would have very little to do with the university’s football program and everything to do with the university’s educational reputation. The young men on the Vanderbilt, Stanford, UCLA, and USC football teams to name a few, are seemingly playing the game at the highest level and still receiving an education comparable to anywhere in the nation.

The notion that it is also somehow flawed that the funds and effort that Salzberg (2011) refers to is somehow limited to men because of the football program is also largely untrue. The NCAA has gone to great lengths over the last several years to make sure that the number of female athletes that are benefiting from these resources matches the number of male athletes. These rules put in place by Title IV are there specifically to balance out the benefits male football players receive.

While many of Salzberg’s (2011) problems with college football being too much for universities are legitimate on the surface, they are all issues that have been given a great deal of consideration and due process, and have been dealt with in a manner that benefits both sport and university. While some universities do a better job than others at promoting the importance of

education over athletics and opportunities for all students, football programs by and large have done a significant amount more to help universities, the student experience and the objective of succeeding academically than they have to hurt them. Salzburg (2011) acknowledges the benefit of an entire athletic department on a university, but he must also recognize the impact that a successful football program has on both an athletic department and a university as a whole.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis sought to look closely into NCAA documents, studies and investigations, as well as case studies from different universities such as Alabama and Texas A&M. In order to create a viable, unbiased perspective, consumers must take into consideration opposing viewpoints in the argument of whether an athletic department can benefit a university. After looking from all perspectives the overwhelming majority of results to all the research gave a consensus that an athletic department benefits a university in a multitude of ways, and even the belief to the contrary seemed to acknowledge that there are indeed some benefits, even if not enough to justify keeping athletic departments intact.

The NCAA was founded over one hundred years ago by a committee headed by the President of The United States of America on the basis of creating a well-rounded student who would be prepared to enter the work force and life beyond academia. Thousands of university leaders across the country who have since made decisions to improve and expand upon athletic departments in hundreds of universities would argue that collegiate athletics has accomplished this very goal. Based on the overwhelmingly positive feedback from student athletes in research conducted both by the NCAA and for this thesis (to a much smaller scale), advanced media exposure, student recruitment benefits, a sense of community, and the numerous other benefits to

communities, students and student-athletes discussed above, university leaders have more than an adequate amount of concrete evidence to back their opinions and continue to fund and support university athletic departments.

The arguments against a collegiate athletic department can be valid, but if the implementation of the athletic department is done with a university's core mission of educating its students in mind then these concerns can be turned into positives. A successful athletic department provides student-athletes with exceptional opportunity that they otherwise would not be offered. Aside from the benefit to student-athletes, athletic departments can provide a sense of community within a university or town and give students a sense of school pride and bring a certain amount of prestige to a university name. This prestige can help to recruit top students and help to build the reputation of any school. The financial burden and conflict of interest that can come with a university athletic department is not an issue for every university and for those that it is a major issue, they have mostly all decided that the countless benefits of an athletic department decidedly outweigh the few drawbacks. America's universities seek to provide elite education and prepare a student to be a well-rounded contributor to society; athletics can contribute in an impactful and positive manner to this pursuit for both the athlete and non-athlete members of the student body alike.

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