

Athletes Get New College Pitch: Check Out Our Tutoring Center



Erik S. Lesser for The New York Times

Georgia spent \$7 million to build an academic center where student athletes have access to everything from computer stations to specialized tutors. [More Photos >](#)

By [PETE THAMEL](#)

Published: November 4, 2006

LOS ANGELES — Chris McFoy, a wide receiver at the [University of Southern California](#), answers to about half a dozen coaches. Off the field, his coaching staff has been much larger.

Multimedia





Temple's academic support has paid off for Leyon Azubuike.

Like many U.S.C. athletes, Mr. McFoy has had a lot of help during his five years as a student. During his freshman season, he met weekly with four tutors, one for each of his classes. He also met with a learning specialist who composed “action plans” to organize his schedule and help him plan for tests and papers. U.S.C. and most other [N.C.A.A.](#) Division I-A universities also use student “class checkers” who traverse campus to make sure athletes are where they are supposed to be.

“There’s no way that you should do bad,” said Mr. McFoy, a 23-year-old senior. “You have to really not care about your grades, or your life in general, to mess up.”

Bigger stadiums and better training facilities are no longer enough to attract some of the most talented football prospects. The competition to create a top athletic program now extends to efforts that help ensure that players survive in class.

Louisiana State University, a perennial championship contender, spent \$15 million to build an academic center for athletes. The [University of Georgia](#), another top-10 football program, built a new facility for \$7 million. At [Temple University](#), long home to one of the nation’s worst football programs, officials increased the academic support budget for athletes by 34 percent in the aftermath of poor academic performance that led to scholarship losses.

All of the nation's more than 100 major college athletic departments employ some type of academic support program. So do some [Ivy League](#) colleges and other smaller institutions. The National Collegiate Athletic Association said Division I athletic departments spend at least \$150 million annually on such programs.

Few in college athletics doubt the importance of helping student athletes succeed. But while college officials say these programs are necessary because athletes must devote so much time to their sports, few other students whose time is consumed by jobs or activities receive as much assistance. Another issue is oversight: The educational support centers often report to the athletic director, who has an interest in keeping athletes eligible to compete, instead of to the academic leadership.

"I think that the people who work in it should be working for the provost," said Jim Delany, the commissioner of the Big Ten Conference.

Investing in Support

U.S.C. spends \$1.5 million annually on tutors and other academic support for its student athletes, more than most programs. The university has 14½ staff positions in its Student Athlete Academic Services Department, having added four positions in the past six years, to serve its 550 student athletes. "We're looking for every opportunity to get ahead," said Pete Carroll, the football coach. Louisiana State's academic center for athletes opened in 2002 and has a corporate sponsor, Cox Communications. A review in *Architectural Record* called the ornate design by Victor Trahan III "sleek," "inspiring" and "almost monastic in character." Georgia's \$1.3 million budget for academic tutoring for its roughly 600 athletes is the same amount that the university spends on its centralized campus tutorial program for its 25,000 undergraduate students. Dell Dunn, the university's vice president for instruction, said the budget for all of Georgia's tutoring services outside athletics rose by \$200,000 when programs in individual departments were included.

Georgia's center for athletes, which was built in 2002, features rows of computers, plush furniture and an electronic check-in system to make sure athletes put in their minimum study hours. The center has 17 full-time staff members and more than 60 tutors.

"It's getting competitive — that's one of the reasons why we have this center," said Becky Galvin, an academic counselor and tutorial coordinator at Georgia. "The coaches started hearing from kids that so-and-so had a nicer academic center. We had a good academic program, but we didn't have all the bells and whistles."

New N.C.A.A. rules can reduce the number of scholarships for colleges whose student athletes do not meet minimum academic standards, a change that has fueled the building boom and budget increases for academic centers. The money usually comes from the athletic department, from ticket sales and television deals, and from the N.C.A.A.

On some campuses, tutoring programs have run into trouble recently. At the [University of South Carolina](#), the senior associate athletic director for academic support arranged for tutors for junior college players not yet enrolled at the university.

At the [University of Tennessee](#) in the late 1990s, a tenured English professor, Linda Bensel-Meyers, found that athletic tutors were doing too much of the work themselves and that the athletic department had the influence to change grades. Bensel-Meyers was ostracized for bringing her findings public, and she later left for the University of Denver.

"Based on my experiences, I would have to say that athletic academic assistance centers serve more as academic evasion centers," Ms. Bensel-Meyers said.

Athletes Get New College Pitch: Check Out Our Tutoring Center

Published: November 4, 2006

(Page 2 of 2)

Many universities have developed training and monitoring programs for tutors, and rules govern how much assistance they can provide. For example, tutors at Tennessee cannot type papers for athletes. Most universities make the tutors sign an integrity contract saying they will not perform work for athletes.



Axel Koester for The New York Times

U.S.C. receiver Chris McFoy used tutors even after his grades showed he did not need them. “I knew they would help motivate me,” he said. [More Photos >](#)

Teaching Independence

At Southern California, Mr. McFoy is a success story. He graduated after four years with a degree in economics and, in his fifth year on campus, is pursuing a double major in political science as he plays football as a “redshirt” senior.

Magdi el-Shahawy, U.S.C.’s director for student athlete academic services, said Mr. McFoy’s experience was ideal. He did well enough eventually to be excused from mandatory team study halls, and he no longer required tutors for all of his classes.

“Our goal in this profession is to create independent, self-regulated learners and teach them what they need to survive,” Mr. Shahawy said.

Mr. Shahawy’s program includes about 50 tutors, all of whom are students, in addition to the 14½ staff positions. He reports to both the provost and the athletic director.

Mr. McFoy said his academic career had not been without incident. Once or twice, he said, he was fined \$10, which was taken from his athletic stipend, for missing an appointment with a tutor.

Even though his grade-point average was high enough that tutors became unnecessary, he sometimes continued with them anyway. “I knew that they would help motivate me,” Mr. McFoy said. “Why not? It’s free.”

Mr. Carroll tries to make academics competitive, like football. U.S.C. has instituted a points system in which athletes can get in trouble with their coaches if they are not attending class or handing in assignments.

Taking Action at Temple

Colleges without the money to pay for such programs can find it harder to recruit and to compete. The struggles at Temple, a public university in Philadelphia, illustrate what can happen.

Last year, the university’s football program lost nine scholarships because of its athletes’ academic shortcomings, the most of any Division I-A program. In what Temple’s athletic director, Bill Bradshaw, called “crisis management,” he said all five Temple academic counselors either resigned or were not rehired for their positions. That led to an overhaul that included luring a counselor from [Notre Dame](#) and the 34 percent budget increase for academic support.

“How does Wendy’s succeed when it doesn’t have McDonald’s budget?” said Temple’s coach, Al Golden. “We have to be creative.”

Formal academic support for college athletes traces back to 1964, and as with just about every major development in college sports, money was a factor.

The president of Notre Dame at the time, the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, asked the fencing coach and engineering professor, Mike DeCicco, to start a program to tutor student athletes.

Television money had become important in college football, and Father Hesburgh worried that universities might sacrifice academic integrity to keep players eligible so they would have strong teams to cash in on television payouts.

To keep that from happening at Notre Dame, Mr. DeCicco began tracking the progress of athletes in class through contact with their professors. If players missed classes, Mr. DeCicco would threaten them with the fencing saber hanging over his desk.

A few years later, Sports Illustrated described Mr. DeCicco's program in an article on Notre Dame's high graduation rate. Calls and visitors came from places like Arizona State, Kentucky and Michigan.

"It was like someone had opened the faucet," Mr. DeCicco said. The career of one Temple linebacker, Leyon Azubuike, a redshirt sophomore, shows the difference the right people can make. In less than a year, Mr. Azubuike has gone from a struggling student with a 1.8 grade-point average, on the brink of becoming ineligible, to a confident student with a 2.2 average.

When Mr. Golden was hired last December, he made his entire staff build two and a half hours into their daily schedules to help the players personally, with a special focus on academics. Mr. Golden took the pool table out of the players' lounge and replaced it with more computers. He posted a list of players not attending class or handing in assignments on the door of the Temple football facility for everyone

to see. He takes one shift a week himself to check players' classes personally.

He made his players get to know their professors, sit in the front row, and not wear hats to class. “If you’re not going to class, you’re going to be suspended,” Mr. Golden said.

Temple increased its academic support staff to nine from six. Peter D’Alonzo, the lead coordinator and a learning specialist at Temple, installed the same program he used at Notre Dame. Freshmen are now mentored by students in Temple’s law school. Students below a 2.4 average are given mandatory study hours and intensive tutoring; Mr. D’Alonzo compared it to doing homework in front of Mom and Dad at the kitchen table.

Mr. Golden said “incredible doesn’t do justice” to the academic turnaround. The team had a grade-point average of more than 3.0 during one session of summer school, and Mr. Bradshaw said the university expected to increase its Academic Progress Rate, the measure the N.C.A.A. uses to gauge progress of student athletes.

But Mr. D’Alonzo is pushing for the tutorial staff to report only to the provost. Noting that the athletic department has an interest in keeping athletes eligible to compete, he said, “It’s entrapment.”

Mr. Azubuike had failed the most basic math course, Math 45, offered by Temple. He credited the new football staff with giving him the confidence and guidance to get a B in the course the second time. He said he was on pace for a B in Math 55, “something I never could have imagined before.”

He is looking forward to raising his average even more by retaking a few classes this summer.

“The biggest difference to me was their love for the student athlete transcended football,” he said. “I’ve been in few situations where the coach cares as much for you personally and academically as they do athletically.”

It Takes Muscle

By LAURA PAPPANO
Published: July 30, 2006

ON the last day of classes, Meredith Cohen is five hours east of Lafayette College, in Room 307 of the Comfort Inn in Worcester, Mass., doing two things most would consider antithetical. She is trying to relax and get hydrated before running the 400 meter in the Patriot League Track and Field Championships — and she is headed full throttle into finals week, banging out the first of five papers and a written summary of a college internship experience.



Paul O. Boisvert for The New York Times

Members of the University of Vermont softball team have schedules crammed with classwork, including a final exam (Annie O'Brien, above), exhausting travel to and from games and actual competition.

Education Life



Kevin Rivoli for The New York Times

“I keep looking and thinking, ‘I have five papers!’ ” says Ms. Cohen, a junior who has a double major in English and French and a 3.57

grade point average. “But Coach yesterday said in the sprinter group meeting: ‘You are here now. You left all that at school.’ ”

Lafayette is one of eight teams gathered for two days of competition at Hart Field on the campus of the College of the Holy Cross.

Autumn Karweil, a biology major at Lafayette, sits in the stands above the track, flipping through index cards for her final in comparative vertebrate neuroanatomy. “I have exams Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday,” says Ms. Karweil, who runs the 1,500 meter. “I can’t really take a weekend off.”

At a nearby Best Western, Gillian Nordquist, a Bucknell freshman, is already in exams, reporting at 7:45 a.m. to the kitchenette counter in Room 604 for a three-hour cultural anthropology final before she runs the 10,000 meter. Her coach, Kevin Donner, is overseeing a dozen athletes taking eight different exams at the hotel. “I look at it as a privilege we are able to proctor the exam on the road,” he says.

Exams on the road? Athletes are finding that academics and sports are two often conflicting masters.

Certainly there are stars for whom college is merely preparation for the N.F.L. or the N.B.A. But most student athletes are not bound for the pros. Like Ms. Cohen and Ms. Nordquist, they love their sport but also care about their grades (and not just for eligibility). They have serious majors like neuroscience. They do problem sets on airplanes and study on the sidelines.

And while it has never been easy, it is getting tougher to juggle sports and studies, particularly for the 148,000 students who compete in Division I, the most competitive in the National College Athletic Association.

The steady march toward more and better play is claiming more time, energy and attention. Once extracurricular activities, even low-profile sports like softball and rifle dominate students’ social circles, schedules and even majors.

“If you are on a team, coaches own your day,” says Edward F. Etzel, a psychologist and associate professor in sports studies at [West Virginia University](#). Mr. Etzel has counseled student athletes since the mid-1980’s and watched sports take over many of their lives. Athletes who once practiced only during the season now train year round, and to stay competitive, they play in noncollegiate tournaments over the summer.

During the season, the [N.C.A.A.](#) caps the time coaches can hold practices to 20 hours a week — but that doesn’t count travel, team study halls, entertaining recruits, or treatment for injuries or physical therapy. It doesn’t include time athletes put in on their own.

The cap is also tough to enforce. It’s an open secret that some coaches hold “voluntary” practices that are not voluntary, use informal “captain’s practices” to add workouts, or employ the don’t-ask-don’t-tell approach. An N.C.A.A. subcommittee on athletes’ well-being reported in January that “there is widespread belief that the 20-hour rule in many programs is routinely violated.” While the subcommittee agreed to discuss refinements, it said the problems had less to do with inadequate rules than with coaches’ failure to take athletes’ academic priorities seriously.

Pamela Richardson, a May graduate of W.V.U., was on the track team. At meetings of student representatives from the Big East conference, she says, she heard many complaints about coaches’ breaking the 20-hour rule. Some coaches, she says, “don’t understand we are here for two reasons.”

But athletes have little recourse when a coach controls their scholarship money and has little accountability. “Coaches may abuse the amount of time they are supposed to have practices, but then athletes don’t say anything,” she says. “Who are they going to tell?”

The larger matter, however, is not stretching rules but what has become the ordinary in-season expectations of playing a college sport.

Pamela Childs, head softball coach at the [University of Vermont](#) who retired in June after 21 years, says long Vermont winters mean the

first 28 games of the season are on the road. The team bus pulls out Friday afternoon, arriving for double-header play on Saturday and another game Sunday before returning to campus. Rain-outs eat into Mondays.

“Honestly, as a coach, I can’t say they don’t make some compromises academically, because they are missing a certain number of classes,” Ms. Childs says. She believes in the strong-mind, strong-body ideal that sport at this level is supposed to epitomize. She has ordered the bus to leave late so five players wouldn’t miss an anatomy class again.

At the same time, she has experienced the thrill — and conflict — of watching the stature of women’s softball grow. Her own job has changed: she coached field hockey in the fall and softball in the spring until softball became a full-time coaching job eight years ago. Last year she added a full-time assistant coach.

But bigger programs have bigger aspirations. “To me this whole collegiate thing should be about them learning and experiencing,” she says. “I kind of feel we are moving toward just winning.”

Put some blame on colleges, eager for the publicity and the glory attached to winning teams. In a speech last January, Myles Brand, the N.C.A.A. president, warned of an athletics arms race: in the last several years Division I expenditures have increased at two to three times the rate of overall university spending.

Public interest in once-minor teams has also blossomed with the arrival of Internet and television outlets dedicated to college sports, including College Sports Television Networks, Fox College Sports and ESPNU. Last month, the Big 10 announced it would create a 24-hour cable network, the first for an athletic conference. Many see in this a positive development for sports once eclipsed by men’s basketball and football. The big-business quality of those sports, however, is spilling over into others, none more so than women’s basketball. Games are now broadcast in prime time, and ratings and media coverage have exploded.

While the Patriot League, Lafayette's conference, was formed in 1984 to guard the balance between academics and athletics, the pressure to improve is leading members to offer more athletic scholarships. Daniel Weiss, president of Lafayette, says they will start offering them in men's basketball this season, to be followed by field hockey and men's soccer.

"It got harder and harder for us to compete," explains Mr. Weiss, who favors the scholarships even as he complains about the "obsession with athletic celebrity" at institutions of higher education.

"Nationally," he says, "the problem is — with the alumni especially — they all want to be better than last year."

Even sports that don't attract much attention know their mission is to win. "Over all, we are a very small piece of the pie here," says the [University of Nebraska](#)'s rifle team coach, Launi Meili. "But people who read the paper want to know that we're good.

They may not spend a lot of time coming to watch us, but knowing we are successful, they take pride in that." The effect on students is mixed. The raised profile of women's basketball recognizes the high quality of play and is a step toward gender equality. Being part of that is exciting, but it's tough on scholar athletes.

Heather Claytor, a sophomore shooting guard for the women's basketball team at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has gotten to bed at 4 a.m. after returning to campus from an away game, and then had to be up for a 9 a.m. psychology class.

As a high school student in Grottoes, Va., Ms. Claytor had done a mentorship with a doctor and wanted to become a pediatrician. But once at U.N.C., where she is on an athletic scholarship, she put aside her pre-med aspirations. "Basketball takes up so much time," she says, noting that pre-season training begins in August and runs until the regular season, November to April. "I would have to wait until the whole basketball thing is over to get into anything as serious as that." For now, she is planning to major in exercise and sports science.

To an extent far beyond what is available to rank-and-file students, athletes enjoy individual hand-holding to improve their chances of graduating on time — an N.C.A.A. priority. Ms. Claytor is grateful for the perks, including tutors who travel with the team and academic advisers to keep them on track. Her need to focus on basketball is plain: the scholarship, which she cannot afford to lose, is good for one year at a time. “It motivates me to work harder because nothing is guaranteed,” she says. “You want to work your hardest to get asked next year.”

THE very rhythm of an athlete’s day leaves little room for late-night pizza, clubs or simply hanging out. At the beginning of her sophomore year, Kristina Fehlings, a member of the University of Nebraska rifle team — and the 2006 N.C.A.A. air rifle champion — decided to join a sorority.

“Everything was piling up,” recalls Ms. Fehlings, now a senior. “You have to be a member of different clubs within the sororities, to decorate banners and plan things.”

When she got a C on an accounting test, she turned to teammates for advice. They gathered at a whiteboard in the team meeting room and helped her chart pros and cons of the sorority. “I had one pro and this huge list of cons,” she says. She quit the sorority.

A chart of the sports pros might include benefits like being able to juggle tasks more efficiently, having coveted entries for résumés and learning on the field. Ms. Fehlings believes that relaxation training for her sport helps when she takes tests.

“I can calm myself and tell myself I know what I am doing,” she says. And sports forges relationships that provide important support.

Ms. Fehlings is not the only athlete to claim that “my closest friends are my teammates because we go through it all together.”

But such connections can also create a troubling isolation. Officials have made the integration of athletes into the student body a subject of essays and conference talks. Questions remain about the rape

allegations made by a stripper hired to perform at a [Duke](#) lacrosse team party on March 13. But these facts remain: the lacrosse players hired a stripper and drank excessively. During spring semester there were national headlines about athletes behaving badly; one Internet site, [badjocks.com](#), is devoted to damning photos of team hazings. Duke administrators are developing a code of conduct this summer for all its athletic teams.

The group-think of sports has stirred concern about a renegade culture on campus. In their report on the Duke administration's handling of the rape charges, William G. Bowen, an author of "Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values," and Julius L. Chambers, former chancellor of North Carolina Central University, warn of "mission creep" and "the widening of an already evident academic-athletic divide."

Kathleen Smith, Duke's faculty athletics representative, conducts exit interviews with student athletes. She sees no fix to the tug of war between coaches and professors but says it is critical for the two sides to understand the demands made on athletes. "What we have seen in recent years is less flexibility on the athletic side," she says.

It should be no surprise, then, that athlete scholars report trouble managing time and stress, says Gregory Wilson, chairman of the department of exercise and sport science at the University of Evansville in Indiana. "It is more athletically and academically demanding than high school, but we are expecting the same results, the same high-level performance from them." Some turn to binge drinking, Mr. Wilson says, "for coping, for blowing off steam."

A 2005 survey of 300 athletes at Boise State University in Idaho revealed that half had eating disorders. (The football team refused to participate.) "A lot of time they turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms like drinking or restricting food intake because it makes them feel they have control over their lives," says Mary Pritchard, an assistant professor of psychology at Boise State. Athletes are told "when to get up, when to go to bed, when to work out and what they will do at their workout." Some students end up retiring from their sport.

ELLEN CORNBROOKS, who teaches anatomy and physiology at the University of Vermont, is one of those professors tugging the other end of the rope. Her course is demanding: in addition to three lectures and a three-hour lab a week, students need two more lab visits a week “to commit the stuff to memory,” she says. “A lot of these kids were A students in high school, and college is a whole different ballgame for them in terms of being able to keep up with their work and play a Division I sport,” she says. “You feel really bad when there are kids who in every class are sitting in the second row, who are just burned out and can’t do better than a C, because you know they are smarter than that and they want more from themselves.”

About 5 percent of her students are athletes. She tries to give them some slack when they’re fresh off a road trip: she doesn’t expect them to be in class or to take a test unless they’ve been back on campus for eight hours, and she adjusts her office hours. Other professors are not so willing, and even Ms. Cornbrooks has her limits. To athletes who just don’t show up, “I am just that scary mean person,” she says. For one of Ms. Cornbrooks’s students, Sara Toczyłowski, a right fielder on the softball team, demanding science classes for a nursing degree square off against a sport that “you have to play year round to be competitive.” She is often dog tired. “You are always trying to run from here to there, and you never think you’ll get anything done, and the stress weighs on you,” she says. Ms. Toczyłowski loves softball and she loves nursing.

The problem is, she says, they “are less compatible than people think they are.”

COLLEGES; Brand Endorses More Aid To Athletes

in California, Nebraska and several other states to increase scholarships to college athletes so they reflect the complete cost of a year at college, the head of the National Collegiate Athletic Association has endorsed the idea of giving athletes an additional \$2,000 to \$3,000 a year.

Myles Brand, the president of the N.C.A.A., said in an interview that he agreed in principle with state lawmakers and a group led by former college athletes that has been pressing universities to cover all the costs borne by athletes at Division I-A colleges. This would go beyond the traditional tuition, room, board and books to include costs like phone bills, transportation and even personal items like soap and toothpaste. Only member institutions or N.C.A.A. committees can propose legislative changes, an N.C.A.A. official said, and such proposals go through a long deliberative process before reaching the board of directors for final approval. But Brand made clear that, as president, he intends to use his bully pulpit to push for cash stipends and other new benefits.

"In my mind it would apply to all varsity sports," he said. "That has to be decided. I don't see any reason to make it exclusively to the two revenue sports, football and basketball. One way to close the gap would be to use the three-quarters of a billion that the N.C.A.A. provides to the universities through their conferences."

Because some universities would balk at the added expense, persuading the N.C.A.A. to expand athletes' benefits will not be easy.

"I don't believe that amount of money, as large as it is, will cover all the costs," Brand said, referring to the television revenue that the N.C.A.A. distributes to universities. "But it would move it in that direction if the conferences and institutions want to use it."

The California State Senate approved a bill in May that calls for the extraordinary step of expelling the N.C.A.A. from the state unless

universities contribute more than they do now to the welfare of student-athletes. Nebraska, Iowa and Texas, all in the Big 12 Conference, are also considering taking action. Nebraska has adopted a law that would pay student-athletes a new cash stipend; the law would only go into effect when three other states in the Big 12 adopt similar laws.

"We take these issues very seriously and we are trying to answer Senator Murray's concerns head-on," Brand said, referring to State Senator Kevin Murray, a co-author of the California bill. In essence, the bill would prohibit the 47 colleges and universities in California, public and private, from being governed by the N.C.A.A. as long as athletic scholarships fall below the actual cost to students of attending the universities.

"Senator Murray is not talking about pay for play," Brand said. "He is talking about student welfare issues. And a number of the student welfare issues he raises are ones with which I concur."

Brand said, for example, that he hoped health insurance would be expanded to cover injuries that may occur outside campus if the injury is reasonably related to athletics.

Murray is clearly skeptical of the N.C.A.A. "If you just take a look at what goes on, it is completely designed to keep the student under the thumb of the N.C.A.A. for the N.C.A.A.'s profit," Murray said. "Now, does the money go for a good cause, meaning university education? Probably so. But it certainly isn't fair in the way it is distributed based upon who contributes to it."

The group that has led the effort to improve college athletes' financial status is called the Collegiate Athletes Coalition. Ramogi Huma, the chairman, said the coalition is not trying to unionize student-athletes, because they are not employees of universities. But he said the group had recruited athletes at each of the Pac-10 colleges. "We feel the N.C.A.A. has shown it was incapable of reforming itself," Huma said.

Murray said his bill is unlikely to be acted upon by the California Assembly until early next year. "We have a general agreement among the Democrats and Republicans on the committee to pass the bill, but we wanted the N.C.A.A. at their January meeting to respond to some of these things," Murray said.

Brand said his call for more lucrative athletic scholarships is part of an effort to supplant the notion of amateurism. "Amateurism was borrowed from the English during the early 19th century and it never fully carried over to America," he said.

He described the contemporary version of university athletics as a collegial model, one that permits enhanced financial aid but does not allow athletes to be paid salaries.

Even though its core idea is still that university athletes are students, Brand said, "the collegial model changes over time."

The Disappearing Scholar-Athlete

Published: April 6, 2002

It is the season of fat and thin envelopes, time for college admissions. This year, once again, the country's most selective liberal arts institutions will offer spots to substantial numbers of students with less than top academic credentials who will perform only passably in class and segregate themselves from other students. They are the varsity athletes brought onto campus by schools that claim both to shun athletic scholarships and to honor the scholar-athlete ideal. That ideal has become something of a mockery because the admission systems at those colleges have lost their bearings.

In a book published last year and in a recent follow-up for a group of New England colleges, James Shulman and William Bowen have shown in alarming detail how out of whack the system has become. Leave aside the many large state schools where the basketball players are effectively semi-pros, rarely and barely graduating. The problem of academically underperforming athletes exists at leafy, historic campuses like Tufts and Middlebury, where only the brightest are supposed to be accepted. Between a quarter and a third of all students at these schools now are varsity athletes, many of them recruited on numbered "coach's lists." Some are excellent students, but between half and three-quarters of male athletes end up in the bottom third of their classes at these institutions.

Yet their athletic prowess offers them a heavy thumb on the admission scale, much more significant than being the child of an alumnus or a member of a racial minority group. Some argue that schools are right to prize talented athletes just as they do fine musicians or writers. But students with musical talent or those who put out the college newspaper tend to do better in school than other students. They also add to the intellectual and cultural stew that makes college campuses exciting. Athletes tend to segregate themselves. This was not always the case. According to the Shulman-Bowen data, varsity athletes of earlier decades did as well in school as their peers and went on to careers of community leadership.

Several colleges are sufficiently alarmed by the data to take modest action. Bowdoin, Wesleyan, Williams and Amherst agreed last fall to reduce by between 10 and 20 percent the number of set-aside spots on coach's lists. Their fellow colleges of the 11-member New England Small College Athletic Conference say they will try to do the same in the coming year or two. And the eight members of the Ivy League, the group that includes Harvard, Yale and Princeton, say they, too, will examine their athletic recruiting policies in light of the new data.

College officials say they recruit top athletes to please alumni and spur their donations. But the Shulman-Bowen study found that alumni favor decreasing their schools' emphasis on intercollegiate competition. Asked to rank their concerns, big donors consistently listed athletics toward the bottom. This is an important lesson for the colleges. Sports are wonderful and everyone likes to win, but not at the cost of sacrificing the identity and special mission of liberal arts education.

NEW YORK TIMES
THE SCHOLARSHIP DIVIDE

Expectations Lose to Reality of Sports Scholarships

By [BILL PENNINGTON](#)

Published: March 10, 2008



At youth sporting events, the sidelines have become the ritual community meeting place, where families sit in rows of folding chairs aligned like church pews. These congregations are diverse in spirit but unified by one gospel: heaven is your child receiving a college athletic scholarship.

Tim Shaffer for The New York Times

Villanova sprinter Elvis Lewis. All N.C.A.A. athletic scholarships must be renewed and are not guaranteed year to year.

Tim Shaffer for The New York Times

Joanie Milhous, the field hockey coach at Villanova, said she recruited “good, ethical parents as much as good, talented kids.”

Parents sacrifice weekends and vacations to tournaments and specialty camps, spending thousands each year in this quest for the holy grail. But the expectations of parents and athletes can differ sharply from the financial and cultural realities of college athletics, according to an analysis by The New York Times of previously undisclosed data from the [National Collegiate Athletic Association](#) and interviews with dozens of college officials.

Excluding the glamour sports of football and basketball, the average N.C.A.A. athletic scholarship is nowhere near a full ride, amounting to \$8,707. In sports like baseball or track and field, the number is routinely as low as \$2,000. Even when football and basketball are included, the average is \$10,409. Tuition and room and board for N.C.A.A. institutions often cost between \$20,000 and \$50,000 a

year. “People run themselves ragged to play on three teams at once so

they could always reach the next level,” said Margaret Barry of Laurel,

Md., whose daughter is a scholarship swimmer at the [University of Delaware](#). “They’re going to be disappointed when they learn that if they’re very lucky, they will get a scholarship worth 15 percent of the \$40,000 college bill. What’s that? \$6,000?”

Within the N.C.A.A. data, last collected in 2003-4 and based on N.C.A.A. calculations from an internal study, are other statistical insights about the distribution of money for the 138,216 athletes who received athletic aid in Division I and Division II.

Men received 57 percent of all scholarship money, but in 11 of the 14 sports with men’s and women’s teams, the women’s teams averaged higher amounts per athlete.

On average, the best-paying sport was neither football nor men’s or women’s basketball. It was men’s ice hockey, at \$21,755. Next was women’s ice hockey (\$20,540).

The lowest overall average scholarship total was in men’s riflery (\$3,608), and the lowest for women was in bowling (\$4,899).

Baseball was the second-lowest men’s sport (\$5,806).

Many students and their parents think of playing a sport not because of scholarship money, but because it is stimulating and might even give them a leg up in the increasingly competitive process of applying to college. But coaches and administrators, the gatekeepers of the recruiting system, said in interviews that parents and athletes who hoped for such money were much too optimistic and that they were unprepared to effectively navigate the system. The athletes, they added, were the ones who ultimately suffered.

Coaches surveyed at two representative N.C.A.A. Division I institutions — [Villanova University](#) outside Philadelphia and the University of Delaware — told tales of rejecting top prospects because

their parents were obstinate in scholarship negotiations.

“I dropped a good player because her dad was a jerk — all he ever talked to me about was scholarship money,” said Joanie Milhous, the field hockey coach at Villanova. “I don’t need that in my program. I recruit good, ethical parents as much as good, talented kids because, in the end, there’s a connection between the two.”

The best-laid plans of coaches do not always bring harmony on teams,

however, and scholarships can be at the heart of the unrest. Who is

getting how much tends to get around like the salaries in a workplace. The result — scholarship envy — can divide teams.

The chase for a scholarship has another side that is rarely discussed. Although those athletes who receive athletic aid are viewed as the ultimate winners, they typically find the demands on their time, minds and bodies in college even more taxing than the long journey to get there.

There are 6 a.m. weight-lifting sessions, exhausting practices, team meetings, study halls and long trips to games. Their varsity commitments often limit the courses they can take. Athletes also share a frustrating feeling of estrangement from the rest of the student body, which views them as the privileged ones. In this setting, it is not uncommon for first- and second-year athletes to relinquish their scholarships.

“Kids who have worked their whole life trying to get a scholarship think the hard part is over when they get the college money,” said Tim Poydenis, a senior at Villanova receiving \$3,000 a year to play baseball. “They don’t know that it’s a whole new monster when you get here. Yes, all the hard work paid off. And now you have to work harder.”

Lack of Knowledge

Parents often look back on the many years spent shuttling sons and daughters to practices, camps and games with a changed eye. Swept up in the dizzying pursuit of sports achievement, they realize how little they knew of the process.

Mrs. Barry remembers how her daughter Courtney rose at 4 a.m. for years so she could attend a private swim practice before school. A second practice followed in the afternoon. Weekends were for competitions. Courtney is now a standout freshman at Delaware after receiving a \$10,000 annual athletic scholarship.

“I’m very proud of her and it was worth it on many levels, but not necessarily the ones everybody talks about,” Mrs. Barry said. “It can take over your life. Getting up at 4 a.m. was like having another baby again. And the expenses are significant; I know I didn’t buy new clothes for a while.

“But the hardest part is that nobody educates the parents on what’s really going on or what’s going to happen.”

When they received the letter from Delaware informing them of Courtney’s scholarship, she and her husband, Bob, were thrilled.

Later,

they shared a quiet laugh, noting that the scholarship might just defray the cost of the last couple of years of Courtney’s youth sports

swim career.

The paradox has caught the attention of [Myles Brand](#), the president of the N.C.A.A.

“The youth sports culture is overly aggressive, and while the opportunity for an athletic scholarship is not trivial, it’s easy for the opportunity to be overexaggerated by parents and advisers,” Mr. Brand said in a telephone interview. “That can skew behavior and, based on the numbers, lead to unrealistic expectations.” Instead, Mr. Brand said, families should focus on academics.

“The real opportunity is taking advantage of how eager institutions are to reward good students,” he said. “In America’s colleges, there is a system of discounting for academic achievement. Most people with good academic records aren’t paying full sticker price. We don’t want people to stop playing sports; it’s good for them. But the best opportunity available is to try to improve one’s academic qualifications.” The math of athletic scholarships is complicated and widely misunderstood.

Despite common references in news media reports, there is no such thing as a four-year scholarship. All N.C.A.A. athletic scholarships must be renewed and are not guaranteed year to year, something stated in bold letters on the organization’s Web site for studentathletes.

Nearly every scholarship can be canceled for almost any reason in any year, although it is unclear how often that happens. In 2003-4, N.C.A.A. institutions gave athletic scholarships amounting to about 2 percent of the 6.4 million athletes playing those sports in high school four years earlier. Despite the considerable attention paid to sports, the select group of athletes barely registers statistically among the 5.3 million students at N.C.A.A. colleges and universities. Scholarships are typically split and distributed to a handful, or even, say, 20, athletes because most institutions do not fully finance the so-called

nonrevenue sports like soccer, baseball, golf, lacrosse, volleyball, softball, swimming, and track and field. Colleges offering these sports often pay for only five or six full scholarships, which are often sliced up to cover an entire team. Some sports have one or two full scholarships, or none at all.

The N.C.A.A. also restricts by sport the number of scholarships a college is allowed to distribute, and the numbers for most teams are tiny when compared with Division I football and its 85-scholarship limit.

A fully financed men's Division I soccer team is restricted to 9.9 full scholarships, for freshmen to seniors. These are typically divvied up among as many as 25 or 30 players. A majority of N.C.A.A. members do not reach those limits and are not fully financed in most of their sports.

Ms. Milhous, whose Villanova field hockey team plays in the competitive Big East Conference, must make tough choices in recruiting. The N.C.A.A. permits Division I field hockey teams to have 12 full scholarships, but her team has fewer.

"I tell parents of recruits I have eight scholarships, and they say: 'Wow, eight a year? That's great,' " she said. "And I say: 'No, eight over four or five years of recruits. And I've got 22 girls on our team.' " That can mean a \$2,000 scholarship, which surprises parents.

"They might argue with me," Ms. Milhous said. "But the fact is I've got girls getting from \$2,000 to \$20,000, and it all has to add up to eight scholarships. It's very subjective, and remember, what I get to give out is also determined by how many seniors I've got leaving."

Two Brothers, Two Stories

Joe Taylor, a soccer player at Villanova, received a scholarship worth half his roughly \$40,000 in college costs when he graduated from a suburban Philadelphia high school three years ago. He had spent years on one of the top travel soccer teams in the country, F.C.

Delco,

and had several college aid offers.

"It was still a huge dogfight to get whatever you can get," Mr. Taylor said. "Everyone is scrambling. There are so many good players, and nobody understands how few get to keep playing after high school."

In 2003-4, there was the equivalent of one full N.C.A.A. men's soccer scholarship available for about every 145 boys who were playing high school soccer four years earlier.

"There's a lot of luck involved really," Mr. Taylor said. "I can pinpoint a time when I was suddenly heavily recruited. It was after a tournament in Long Island the summer after my junior year. I scored a few goals. The Villanova coach was there, and so were some other college coaches. Within a couple of days, my in-box was full of emails.

I've wondered, What would have happened if didn't play well that day?"

Mr. Taylor has a younger brother, Pat, who followed in his footsteps, playing on the same national-level travel team and for the same Olympic developmental program.

"He did everything I did, and in some ways I think he's a better player

than me,” Joe said. “But you know, I think he didn’t have the big game when the right college coaches were there. He didn’t get the money offers I did.”

Pat Taylor is a freshman at Loyola College in Baltimore. Though recruited, he did not make the soccer team during tryouts last fall. “I feel terrible for him — he worked as hard as I did for all those years,” Joe Taylor said.

Their father, Chris Taylor, said he once calculated what he spent on the boys’ soccer careers.

“Ten thousand per kid per year is not an unreasonable estimate,” he said. “But we never looked at it as a financial transaction. You are misguided if you do it for that reason. You cannot recoup what you put in if you think of it that way. It was their passion — still is — and we wanted to indulge that.

“So what if we didn’t take vacations for a few years.”

Pat Taylor, who started playing soccer at 4, said it took him about a month to accept that his dream of playing varsity soccer on scholarship in college would not happen. He looks back fondly on his youth career but also wishes he knew at the start what he knows now about the process.

“The whole thing really is a crapshoot, but no one ever says that out loud,” he said. “On every team I played on, every single person there thought for sure that they would play in college. I thought so, too. Just by the numbers, it’s completely unrealistic.

“And if I had it to do over, I would have skipped a practice every now and then to go to a concert or a movie with my friends. I missed out on a lot of things for soccer. I wish I could have some of that time back.”