There are several persuasive arguments as to why college athletes should be paid, but those arguments ultimately fail because the first duty of a university is to educate, not to hire entertainers. Despite the failings of the current system, paying athletes runs contrary to the primary function of educational institutions.

Does it make sense for an academic institution to run a multimillion dollar entertainment business, which is what college football and college basketball have become? Does it make sense for these institutions to pay the student-athletes who participate in these football and basketball programs?

The reality is that college sports programs, namely the "big name" programs such as football and basketball programs at marquee schools, are businesses that stand to make a large amount of money for their respective schools. According to an article in the *Harvard Journal on Legislation*, "[i]n the past twelve years, the amount of money generated by these two sports has increased nearly 300%, such that they now fund almost all other sports programs." The student-athletes who participate in these programs are part of the reason why these schools stand to make such handsome profits: through ticket sales, endorsement deals, broadcasting deals, and jersey sales (although player names cannot be represented on jerseys), among other things.

Mark Murphy, Director of Athletics at Northwestern University, who participated in an ESPN [sports television network] debate on the topic of paying student-athletes, argues that these athletes currently receive scholarships, whose value, in some instances, totals close to $200,000 over four years. He stated that all student-athletes have made similar commitments to the schools, and that football and basketball players should not be treated any different than other athletes, who participate in sports that are not as popular and lucrative. Paying athletes anything beyond a scholarship, argues Murphy, would cause problems, particularly from a gender equity standpoint. What Murphy seems to be referring to when he says "gender equity" is Title IX federal regulations, which cut off federal funding of colleges if those colleges discriminate on the basis of sex. Paying male student athletes more than female student-athletes could possibly be construed as discrimination.

**Arguments for Payment**

However, others argue that these athletes are producing revenues not only for the schools, which gives these students scholarships, but also for shoe companies, television networks, and the conference in which these schools belong. Moreover, the equity problem could obviously be solved if all collegiate athletes get paid the same base salary for their participation.

There are also student-athletes who have to leave school early because they do not have enough money to continue, or to pay their bills and leaving school for a career in professional sports is an easy
way of making money. The argument is that if student-athletes get paid, they will remain in school and complete their education.

But, is money such a big problem for these student-athletes? Don't they receive scholarships? How much more money do they need? The truth is that "full" scholarships do not always entirely cover tuition and cost of living. However, these students can still do what a majority of students do, which is to get loans. Still, some of these student-athletes do not qualify for such loans, so there is still a gap between the money they get and the total cost of attendance. This gap, coupled with the fact that football and basketball players help generate so much revenue, has caused some intercollegiate teams to provide their athletes with extra compensation, which is in direct violation of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) bylaws.

Perhaps creating a method of payment above and beyond scholarships would help to decrease the amount of corruption, and "under the table" activities of some of these nationally recognized sports programs. But creating such a system may also lead to other problems. Developing such an economy in college football and basketball would result in a monetary race to buy the best athletes in the country. This would lead to a significant gap in talent between rich schools and poor schools. The disparity would result in a lack of competition, and may result in "Cinderella" teams [teams that rise from hardship] becoming a thing of the past. The more the disparity, the less the competition, and the less the competition, the less excitement. Less excitement will result in less revenue, and less revenue means less money for collegiate programs other than basketball and football. Ultimately, however, the main concern with paying athletes should not be one of establishing competitive balance and preserving "Cinderella" teams.

Education Ahead of Hired Entertainers

The main problem with paying student-athletes is that it is not the college's primary function. The primary function of academic institutions is to educate, and not to hire student-athletes for their contributions on the basketball court or football field. Moreover, colleges already provide student-athletes with an invaluable benefit. This benefit comes in the form of a college degree, which gives students opportunities in the job market that they would otherwise not have had. These basketball and football programs also provide some student-athletes the opportunity to get excellent educations for which they normally would not have been qualified, or have applied. These programs also give student-athletes the opportunity to become professional athletes. Moreover, most of these sports programs have been around long before present-day student-athletes began to participate in them. How much of the financial success can be attributed to the players, especially in college sports, where a team's success is largely dependent on the coach's and his or her staff's abilities?

Many of these programs were profitable long before some of these players arrived, and some of these players probably chose a particular program because of their past success. These players may have chosen a school due to the amount of scholarship money they were receiving, but scholarship money is usually not enough to overwhelm other considerations such as a school's academic standing, the coach's leadership and teaching skills, and a school's reputation. Paying student-athletes any more than a scholarship would put such considerations in jeopardy, resulting in students making decisions based on how much money they are offered, as opposed to making decisions based on where they
will succeed in all aspects of college life. The college experience, a student-athlete's educational experience should be about more than just dollars and cents.

**Facilitating Education for Athletes**

Despite the strength of the reasons as to why student-athletes should not be paid, there are certain problems with the current NCAA system which can and should be cured. The gap between a full scholarship and the cost of attendance should be covered by the academic institution, especially when a student athlete does not qualify for a loan. Such a policy will go a long way in ensuring that student-athletes are not leaving school to become professional athletes because they cannot pay their bills. Academic institutions should be able to provide at least that much for their athletes. Ultimately, this is a form of payment, but it is not the type of payment that some individuals are advocating. The primary purpose of these institutions is to educate; it is the coach's job to teach, and not just in terms of the sport a student athlete plays. These schools should facilitate the educations of student-athletes through scholarship grants, but not through a system of salaries dependent on supply and demand, which ultimately detracts a student-athlete from picking a school, and detracts them from attending a school, for the right reasons.

**Further Readings**

**Books**


**Periodicals**


• Debbie Lazorik "Why Integrate Athletics Back into Campus Life?" *Women in Higher Education*, vol. 15, no. 12, December 2006.


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