

Journal of Student Financial Aid

Volume 18 | Issue 3

Article 3

12-1-1988

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Robert R. Butler

Dasha E. Little

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Recommended Citation

Butler, Robert R. and Little, Dasha E. (1988) "No Need Scholarships: Intellectual Integrity and Athletic Arrogance," *Journal of Student Financial Aid*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 3 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/jsfa/vol18/iss3/3>

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No Need Scholarships: Intellectual Integrity and Athletic Arrogance

by
Robert R. Butler
and
Dasha E. Little

Administrators, faculty, student services staff and students express their views about "no-need" scholarships. Data are presented, trends discussed and implications are considered.

American higher education is faced with a four-edged sword: social, philosophical, political and economic. Confronted with a shrinking stream of high school graduates financially able to pursue college degrees, institutions of higher education are seeking ways to survive. Student financial aid and enrollment planning have prompted a variety of tactics designed to lure students. These practices have critics implying the occurrence of institutional bidding wars.

During the past quarter century, need-based financial aid has become common place and many states, along with the federal government, use student need as the determinant in awarding financial aid. The issue being raised is whether justification exists for so many government need-based programs.

The social ramifications of the four-edged sword are perhaps intuitively obvious. Statistics reflect that in 1984, 33.8 percent of American blacks, 28.4 percent of American Hispanics and 11.5 percent of American whites lived below poverty level. That the children of these families have the where-with-all, academic or otherwise, to receive no-need assistance for education - or just receive education - is somewhat doubtful. One alternative is athletics. This option is also cause for concern. This paper is limited to a discussion of no-need financial assistance as it relates to academic and athletic talent.

So how does higher education attract its students, project enrollment for budgetary planning, and then provide opportunity (for all) to obtain education according to interest? Some institutions are both desirous and capable of pursuing intellectual integrity as well as athletic recognition and achievement; many are not. So when institutional thrust has been decided, whether by visionary administrators or by overzealous alumni, image is born. And, bodies are bought.

There appears to be a curious admixture of philosophy and politics operating at this point. Philosophically, what becomes of the long-touted - *revered?* - equal educational opportunity for all? Politically, to "win one for the gipper" demands brawn, with all its dazzling array of "moves." And winning is not enough. One must conquer the arch-rival and be bowl-bound, or coaches contracts are bought up and the search goes on. Academically elite institutions continue as beacons attracting the top two or three percent of high school graduates. Mere bodies seeking education for altruistic reasons become statistics known as "student credit hours."

Robert R. Butler is a professor in Counselor Education at The University of Nebraska at Omaha. While working on a Master's Degree in Student Personnel at the same University, Dasha E. Little collected the data for this manuscript as an internship project in the Financial Aid Office.

Obviously, when that rare combination of brains and brawn is obtained, everyone in academe is elated. The "image" sustains a certain "ivy-quality," and bowl talk has its place in the various circles of activity within the institution. Somehow, the students who one day will become the rank and file, tax paying America, will begin their academic life much like they will one day live - paying for it.

The rank and file students do figure out how to finance their own education. Although many succeed, the demand to "make ends meet" erodes the quality of the educational experience for many. Perhaps this contributes to such students learning (literally) how to live in a society where the bulk of the expenses for running America are borne by those who have to "make ends meet." Lacking whatever is required for 'no-need scholarships,' they persevere. In this way they can indirectly help their less fortunate "poverty-level" counterparts described above. Meanwhile, the demand for brains and brawn continues, and is a relatively high priced commodity.

Economically, higher education is struggling. Perhaps because of its own doings. Once image is determined, who can afford it? Bidding for athletic talent is fierce. And rare is the institution whose income from athletics fully covers such costs. Dollars used to sustain such endeavors are dollars unavailable to promote education for all. Bidding for academic talent also has its own reward. Many would claim that "buying brains" stimulates faculty and encourages scholarship. Such logic has been questioned. Amherst, Brown, Harvard and some 25 or 30 other top northeastern institutions signed an agreement in 1980 opposing the use of no-need scholarships (Barol, Burgower, Schwartz, Pigott and Gerachowski, 1984.)

Current Practice

Most educators know that merit scholarships are not of recent origin. The upsurge in their usage lately, however, has stirred much discussion. Porter and McColloch (1984) conducted one of the more comprehensive studies relevant to no-need scholarships. Of the 367 responses in their study, 305 indicated they do award no-need scholarships. Almost one-half of those indicated such programs had been in existence for over 12 years at that time.

Haines (1984) is an outspoken critic of such programs. At the 1984 National Conference on Higher Education he stated:

. . . I call them enticement scholarships. When they are offered by government, which is rare but threatens to become common, I call them irresponsible and immoral. I believe that no-need scholarships are wrong-wrong for society, wrong for institutions, and wrong for students, even those who receive them.

He then proceeds to delineate eight reasons offering justification for his position.

Points of view have also been expressed in the popular literature. The editors for the Education section of *Newsweek on Campus* (1984, November) quote several people from various institutions of higher education (e.g., Richard Stabel, Dean for Admissions at Rice University; Ellen Hartigan, Director for University Admissions at Adelphi University; and, Robert Fay, Director for Enrollment Management at Boston College). The sense of their comments raises the following question: As colleges lure scholars, are they cheating the needy? Quinn (1984) points out the current efforts to buy the brightest result in "the pricey private schools having to offer better and better deals, or die."

Biemiller (1985) summarizes comments made at the College Board's Town Meeting on Admission Practices. He notes that the proliferation of conflicting admissions deadlines and the use of "no-need" scholarships to attract students threaten to tarnish the reputation of the nation's colleges and universities.

These varying points of view concerning the utilization of no-need scholarships,

along with reduced student aid in the past few years, prompted this concern and the following question. The concern: If schools have so much money for students who don't need it, then for the United States government to provide dollars for need-based programs is somewhat paradoxical.

The question: What are the attitudes of administrators, faculty, student services staff, scholarship recipients and students toward the use of no-need scholarships? No-need scholarships are considered as programs of financial assistance which do not consider financial need as a criterion for the award.

The Study

In the Fall 1987 a large, midwestern, land-grant institution became a sponsor for the National Merit Scholarship Service (NMSS). A study of that practice was undertaken to answer the question raised above.

Instrument. A questionnaire was developed using the views and ideas most prevalent in the literature. After a pilot use with selected personnel, the final form consisted of 22 items divided into four categories which, again, reflected themes in the literature. These categories and the number of items comprising each were: Recruitment (9), Retention (5), Reward (4) and Distribution of Funds (4). A five point Likert Scale ranging from one (1) strongly disagree to five (5) strongly agree comprised the response format.

Population and Sample. The questionnaire was sent (via campus mail) to all Student Services Staff, all merit scholarship recipients, and a random sample of administrators, faculty and students.

Analysis. The data were subjected to a one-way analysis of variance to determine if groups differed significantly from each other in their attitudes concerning the use of no-need scholarships. Significant F-ratios were then analyzed by comparing pairs of means to identify which groups did, in fact, differ from one another. This analysis used the method proposed by Scheffe (Kerlinger, 1964).

Results

Using a follow-up mailing, a return rate of 68% was obtained. Analysis of the data resulted in an F-ratio significant at the .05 level on three of the four scales -Recruitment, Reward and Distribution of Funds (see Table 1).

This finding suggested the appropriateness of determining (in *aposteriori* fashion) where, in fact, the differences were. Because of the rigorousness of the Scheffe method, the .10 level of confidence was used as recommended by Scheffe. These data are presented as Table 2.

Regular students (Group 3) differed significantly from Student Services Staff (Group 1), Scholarship Recipients (Group 2) and Administrators (Group 4) concerning using no-need scholarships as a recruiting tool. Regular students had views most parallel to those held by faculty. Regarding how these monies should be distributed, Regular Students (Group 3) differed significantly from Administrators (Group 4) and Faculty (Group 5). Also, Student Services Staff (Group 1) differed significantly from Faculty (Group 5) on this same scale.

Discussion

Though this study looked only at attitudes concerning the use of no-need scholarships as reflected by five distinct groups on one university campus, comment is appropriate regarding buying brawn. One need only to look at the final ratings of any poll, or the major bowl pairings for any given year, to see which institutions are successful in accumulating athletic talent. Such rankings, attendance figures, won-lost records, etc., reflect realistically the prevailing attitude by most within the institution towards the use of no-need funds.

The data in this study suggest several noteworthy comments. Basically, "regular" students had no strong opinion either way about using no-need scholarships as a recruiting tool. By contrast, administrators felt the strongest ($x = 3.45$), followed by faculty ($x = 3.42$), then scholarship recipients ($x = 3.41$), that buying brains was a desirable practice. Item content indicates that use of no-need scholarships are acceptable for increasing enrollment, buying intellect, upgrading "reputation" and assisting financial aid officers in recruitment by these groups.

Table 1

Analysis of Variance for Non-need Scholarship Data

Scales	Source	ss	df	ms	f
Recruit	Between	3.13	4	.78	4.02*
	Within	26.34	136	.194	
	Total	29.47	140		
Reward	Between	4.47	4	1.12	2.55*
	Within	59.70	136	.439	
	Total	64.17	140		
Retention	Within	1.40	4	.36	.867
	Between	56.41	136	.415	
	Total	57.81	140		
Distribution of Funds	Within	7.33	4	1.83	5.00*
	Between	49.75	136	.366	
	Total	57.08	140		

* $P < .05$

Such attitudes prompt discussions about whether or not buying intellectualism is the preferred (only?) way to stimulate scholarship; if such practice will off-set declining enrollments; whether government will continue to decrease need-based aid since so much no-need based money is available; and other related issues. Interestingly, while the groups did not differ significantly from each other, all groups (including the "Regular" students — who did have an opinion!) agreed that no-need scholarships ought to be considered a reward of academic talent. In fact, the means for each group were the highest (for this scale) of the four scales studied.

Likewise, while the differences were not significant, all groups agreed retention of no-need scholarship students is important. Furthermore, such students are expected to become leaders on campus and give the institution credibility within academe.

When considering how funds are to be distributed, Student Services Staff (SSS) differed significantly from Faculty in their views. SSS ($x = 3.06$) were more inclined to think money for need-based scholarships ought not be diminished by the offering of no-need scholarships. Faculty ($x = 2.50$) disagreed and preferred encouragement of money being allocated for "intellectualism," despite the availability of funds for those in need.

Table 2

Summary of Means Compared Two at a Time - Significant Findings Only

Scale & Groups	Scores		F
	x	S.D.	
Recruitment			
3 N=19	3.035	.361	
1 N=40	3.150	.393	14.98*
2 N=31	3.416	.515	8.81*
4 N=32	3.450	.460	10.84*
Distribution of funds			
3 N=19	3.242	.691	
4 N=32	2.719	.666	8.90*
5 N=19	2.505	.612	14.09*
1 N=40	3.060	5.42	
5 N=19	2.505	.612	10.84*

Note: Group 1 = Student Services Staff; 2 = Scholarship Recipients; 3 = Regular Students; 4 = Administrators; 5 = Faculty

* $P < .10$

Similarly faculty ($x=2.50$) and administrators ($x=2.71$) also disagreed with regular students ($x=3.24$) and indicated no-need funding should not be made available at the expense of not making available need-based scholarships.

Summary

While differences of attitude existed between the groups studied, certain common themes emerged. All groups generally agreed that no-need scholarships are to be used for recruitment and reward of academic talent. Furthermore, this talent should be identified to faculty, enrolled in programs which are academically more rigorous, and be required to maintain certain standards of performance. And, consensus of thought among the groups studied, with the exception of the regular student group, is that monies used for no-need scholarships should not lessen the amounts available for need-based scholarships.

These findings parallel, in many instances, the findings reported by Porter and McCulloch (1982). For example, the average dollar value of no-need scholarships (undergraduate) was \$1,000 or less for more than 75 percent of the 401 institutions they surveyed. Over three-fourths also indicated that such scholarships are used in the recruiting process. Approximately forty-seven percent renewed the scholarships when a minimum quality point average (QPA) was achieved. Close to sixty percent indicated students did not need to be applying for financial aid in order to be eligible to receive a scholarship.

Responses in the Porter/McColloch survey to open-ended questions reveal that the majority (61%) favored the practice of using no-need scholarships and 72% supported their use as a recruiting aid.

A note of caution is presented here regarding scholar/athletes. Regardless of the zeal of some institutions to offer "champion-calibre" athletics, the issue of whether athletes receiving financial assistance are not financially needy needs to be studied. Whether financial need exists, whether a University/College would want to assist students regardless of their talent — or lack thereof, and related questions are appropriate areas for additional study. Given that several institutions (in Division III Athletics) are restricted to awarding financial assistance to varsity athletes based upon need further compounds the issue. The importance of practices by such institutions no doubt varies by setting.

The findings of this study and the Porter/McColloch survey suggest critics of no-need scholarships represent a minority view. While there are moot points regarding questionable "bidding tactics," the disappearance of education for the masses, inept methods for stimulating scholarship, and, an unlikely cure for declining enrollments, the practice flourishes. But unlike athletics, where the winners obtain "walk-ons" who often are more talented than others' recruits, those institutions which build their reputations by buying brains will perhaps never achieve the stature of the 'pricey private schools'. The issue seems to be: can one blame them for trying?

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