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Johnnie Student-Athletes: In that Order

The new school year has started and the fall collegiate athletic seasons are now underway. With all the excitement and media this generates, it is worth remembering the important differences between the student-athlete experience at Division III institutions and other NCAA schools.



Money plays a significantly different role across the three NCAA athletic divisions. In DI, where the most well-known athletic schools compete, the marquee sports of football and basketball generate significant revenue for many (though certainly not all) of these institutions, and those dollars fund most of the costs for lesser followed sports (as well as playoff

costs in DII and DIII). In DI athletics, scholarships also play a big role in attracting students to specific programs across all sports.

The story is slightly different in DII where there is little income to be earned because the TV revenue is a small fraction of that available to DI programs. Scholarships are still important, but they are usually not as lavishly funded and often cover only a fraction of the costs of attendance, though for many students and their families, that support is crucial.

What is most significant about the scholarships at the DI and DII level is the impact they can have on student-athletes' educational experience. When a coach, under pressure to produce winning teams, commits limited scholarship dollars to a student, he or she expects a significant commitment from the student-athlete in return—both emotionally and in terms of time.

Sometimes that works just fine, as the student wants to make that commitment, has a good learning experience on the field or court, and can comfortably handle their academic responsibilities while meeting the expectations of their coach. In other cases, the commitment to an athletic program, with practice time expected throughout the whole year and travel for contests, can negatively impact a student's academic and social experience, resulting in poor academic outcomes and little exposure to the benefits of extra-curricular learning.



The DIII model is fundamentally different. When a student chooses a DIII institution, he or she knows they will be first and foremost a student because their commitment to an athletic team is purely voluntary and if their love of sport ever diminishes or gets in the way of other priorities, they can simply walk away.

There are no economic incentives affecting that decision. Student-athletes view their varsity participation as only a part of their holistic educational experience and coaches recruit and structure their programs with this in mind.

At Saint John's University our coaches have long recruited well-rounded student-athletes who, while contributing to successful teams, have an impact on campus in the classroom and beyond. These student-athletes, while deeply passionate about their sport, know that their undergraduate education is an important stepping stone to a professional life that will not involve athletics and therefore the very best education they can get involves academics, character building and learning outside the classroom, in addition to the important learning athletics provides.

At Saint John's we are especially proud of our student-athletes' commitment to their academic work. Last year we compared the GPA of the 30% of our students who are varsity athletes to that of the rest of the student body and discovered that the athletes' GPAs were slightly higher. Johnnies also do well when competing for Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) Academic All-Conference honors. For the third time in the last four years, SJU led the conference with 68 male Academic All-MIAC honorees in 2016-17, 12 ahead of the second-place tie between Gustavus Adolphus and the University of St. Thomas (56). The Johnnies led the league with 57 honorees in 2013-14 and 63 in 2015-16, and finished second with 50 in 2014-15. To qualify for Academic All-MIAC recognition, student-athletes must be a sophomore,

junior or senior with a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.50 on a 4.00 scale and compete in 50% of their team's varsity contests.



The MIAC, in addition to being one of the strongest athletic conferences nationally, counts among its members Carleton, Macalester and St. Olaf, schools with national reputations for academic excellence.

The availability of athletic scholarships undoubtedly gives many young men and women the opportunity to pursue a college degree and the competition in DI athletics provides significant pleasure to millions of fans. But the biggest NCAA division, DIII, offers a different model where young women and men are students first and athletes second, and where they truly play for love of the game.

Come out and watch. You may not see many future professional athletes, but you will see the next generation of business professionals, doctors, educators, lawyers and community leaders.

By [Michael Hemesath](#) | September 7th, 2017 | Categories: [Higher Education](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).