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The Original Sin of College Sports: College Presidents' Ineffectual Use of Special Admissions

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The Original Sin of College Sports: College Presidents' Ineffectual Use of Special Admissions

By Gerard Gurney, *University of Oklahoma*; Lisa Rubin, *Kansas State University*; Sarah Stokowski, *Clemson University*; and B. David Ridpath, *Ohio University*

College presidents, particularly at selective institutions, often employ their authority to invite athletes who lack basic academic skills onto their campuses and build curricula and academic support systems to maintain their eligibility. In order to maintain a level playing field, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) legislation grants university presidents a special authority to admit talented athletes by special exception. According to the NCAA 2018-2019 Division I Manual, Bylaw 14.1.1.1 stipulates,

a student-athlete may be admitted under a special exception to the institution's normal entrance requirements if the discretionary authority of the president or chancellor (or designated admissions officer or committee) to grant such exceptions is set forth in an official document published by the university (e.g., official catalog) that describes the institution's admissions requirements (p. 161).

This rule is essentially the governing body delegating its academic oversight responsibility to college presidents for admission of competitive athletic talent to their institutions.

On a typical fall afternoon, 85,000 or more exuberant fans will crowd into their favorite college stadia to observe the uniquely American ritual of college football. Millions more are absorbed in the contest watching television broadcasts. Few other platforms offer advertisement like this sport for universities. Since the start of college sport as a commercial enterprise,

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college presidents have consternated over the relation of intercollegiate sport to the educational mission of the university. In a 1915 essay, William T. Foster, President of Reed College in Tacoma, Washington noted: "When athletics are conducted for business, the aims are (1) to win games—to defeat another person or group being the chief end; (2) to make money — as it is impossible otherwise to carry on athletics as business; (3) to attain individual or group fame and notoriety. These three — which are the controlling aims of intercollegiate athletics — are also the aims of horseracing, prize-fighting, and professional baseball" (Foster, 1915, p. 116)

Historically, there was no governing body over institutions' imposing standards for admittance besides the accreditation process. Accreditors certify that institutions maintain a level of quality to provide postsecondary education, and all regional accrediting bodies have standards regarding admissions and recruiting students. For example, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Institutions of Higher Education has the following policy regarding admissions:

Standards for admission ensure that student qualifications and expectations are compatible with institutional objectives. Individuals admitted demonstrate through their intellectual and personal qualifications a reasonable potential for success in the programs to which they are admitted. If the institution recruits and admits individuals with identified needs that must be addressed to assure their likely academic success, it applies appropriate mechanisms to address those needs so as to provide

reasonable opportunities for that success. Such mechanisms receive sufficient support and are adequate to the needs of those admitted. The institution endeavors to integrate specifically recruited populations into the larger student body and to assure that they have comparable academic experiences (National Associations for College Admissions, 2014, p. 116).

The accreditation process requires institutions to develop standards fit for postsecondary education while also ensuring students are qualified to attend and be successful in the college academic environment. When the NCAA was formed in 1906, the Association's role served largely as a place for debate over many issues such as rules of games and which students may participate (Smith, 2011). Institutions managed their own admissions requirements, and the NCAA followed what was essentially dubbed the "home rule," leaving educational quality and minimum requirements for the entrance of all students to the colleges and universities (Smith, 2011). However, as the NCAA expanded its membership, and with that, the development of rules and policies, the conversation continued on the roles of business and college sport in higher education and whether there should be a national standard for students to participate in college athletics.

In 1939, the University of Chicago, a founding member of the Big Ten Conference, dropped football to concentrate its resources on scholarly pursuits. The university's president, Robert M. Hutchins, was famously quoted as saying, "Football, fraternities and fun have no place in the university. They were introduced only to

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entertain those who shouldn't be in the university" (Benson, 2012, para. 3). One wonders the pushback a college president who presides over a large athletics program might receive today from alumni, donors, and trustees should he or she attempt to withdraw the university from the conference. No other college president of what was or is currently defined as a "powerhouse" NCAA Division I athletics program has since followed Hutchins' example of excluding college sport from its academic mission (Clark, 2013).

Several presidents attempted to reform athletics unsuccessfully in the 1930s. In 1931, President Thomas Gates from the University of Pennsylvania implemented a policy of "athletics for all (Smith, 2011, p. 72) and attempted to have faculty oversee the initiative through an academic department. He emphasized the need to keep coaching salaries at or below that of the faculty, and to eliminate special services geared just for athletes, including financial aid designated for athletic ability. This policy seemed to only work at Penn through 1948, but never really caught on at competing institutions.

In 1938, John Bowman, Chancellor at the University of Pittsburgh, aimed to make his institution an academic icon through a focus on new facilities. Bowman opted to treat athletes as employees rather than subsidized students by eliminating athletic scholarships, and instituted stronger academic benchmarks for athletic participation. Like at Penn, Pitt attempted to have faculty oversee athletics; however, soon relations between the athletic director, coach, and campus were strained (Smith, 2011). As a result, the football team struggled to maintain its winning tradition.

Another president in the east, Frank Graham from the University of North Carolina, brought his reform ideas to the Southern Conference in 1935. He also

hoped to purge athletic scholarships, make freshmen ineligible for competition, and ban recruiting among other ideas. Not only were faculty, alumni, and students at UNC completely against this plan, but several institutions in the conference were not completely buying into the plan (Smith, 2011; Stone, 1987). The plan narrowly passed in a conference vote, but it only lasted a short time. Strong resistance and pushback from coaches, fans, alumni and sportswriters increased as the conference was unable to compete with its neighboring Southeastern Conference foes, who invested plenty into athletic scholarships and additional benefits for athletes (Stone, 1987). It is clear that college presidents have engaged in strategies to provide athletes with greater admissions access to selective universities for the expressed purpose of increasing the likelihood of fielding winning teams, and by doing so, gaining notoriety for the expanding the commercial enterprise of intercollegiate athletics.

In America, winning football teams create the illusion of a great university. George Lynn Cross, the longest serving president of the University of Oklahoma (1943-1968), believed Oklahomans had a mass inferiority complex after the Dust Bowl, and installing a winning football team would restore their dignity (Young, 2011). President Cross addressed the state legislature during a period of unprecedented winning football teams when he was asked as to why he needed so much money for the university. He famously replied that he wanted to build a university that the football team would be proud of (Pittman, 2009). The University of Oklahoma became one of the elite teams in college football with seven national championships to its credit and a packed stadium of 90,000 fans every fall Saturday. Whether that has made it a better academic institution is a topic that can be endlessly debated but at least has

some mythological merit. Over the history of intercollegiate athletics, the public's view of winning football and men's basketball teams has at least in part determined the success or failure of a college president and even the reputation of the university itself. In today's governance of intercollegiate athletics, college presidents may privately reflect attitudes ranging from cheerleading to exasperation, but ultimately find that it is not in their best interest to get involved in significant reform (Gurney, Lopiano & Zimbalist, 2017).

Academic standards for athlete admissions and initial athletic eligibility remained in the domain of individual universities and athletic conferences (Smith, 2011) until Rixford Snyder, the Dean of Admission and Faculty Athletics Representative at Stanford University, demanded a national standard for athletics participation. During the start of the Space Age and the Cold War, Snyder addressed the 1959 NCAA convention by saying, "The age of rockets and satellites will not accept the free ride for an athlete of limited academic potential while the physicist with only modest physical prowess goes unaided financially" (Gurney et. al, 2017, p. 34). In 1962, the NCAA developed a national standard initial eligibility metric based on a scale of high school grades and standardized test scores. Using this standard, prospective athletes were predicted to earn at least a 1.6 college grade point average after the first year of college (Smith, 2011). The implementation of stunningly low eligibility standards such as those developed by the NCAA set the groundwork for selective institutions to develop special admissions standards in order to be athletically competitive.

The abuse that stemmed from universities' accepting academically underprepared students vastly influenced recruiting efforts

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and eligibility standards by focusing on athletic rather than academic ability (Ridpath, 2002; Ridpath, Kiger, Mak, Eagle & Letter 2007). Ultimately, the continuous practice of institutions admitting college athletes on the basis of athletic talent instead of academic merit led the NCAA, the largest governing body of intercollegiate sport, to introduce initial eligibility standards in 1962 (Ridpath, et. al 2007; Smith, 1990). In essence, the NCAA set forth criteria to determine if a prospective college athlete could be classified a qualifier (Ridpath, 2002; Ridpath, et. al, 2007). Bylaw 14.02.13.1 in the NCAA 2018-2019 Division I manual states,

A qualifier is a student who, for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid, practice and competition, has met all of the following requirements (see Bylaw 14.3):

- (a) Graduation from high school;
- (b) Successful completion of a required core curriculum consisting of a minimum number of courses in specified subjects;
- (c) Specified minimum grade-point average in the core curriculum; and
- (d) Specified minimum SAT or ACT score (NCAA, 2018, p. 161)

In practical terms, this minimal standard became the de facto admissions standard for many selective institutions aiming to field competitive teams. The criteria for a qualifier has changed throughout the history of initial eligibility.

THE EVOLUTION OF INITIAL ELIGIBILITY

1.6 Rule: The 1.6 Rule, established in 1962, was modeled after the initial eligibility standard in the Atlantic Coast Conference

(ACC). The ACC was the first conference to have minimum academic standards for college athletes (Ridpath, 2002). Essentially, the 1.6 Rule consisted of calculations based on a prospective college athlete's standardized test score and grade point average (Oriard, 2009). The calculation then predicted if a prospective college athlete had the potential to earn a college grade point average of at least a 1.6. The 1.6 Rule did little to ensure prospective college athletes were prepared for higher education (Gurney, Tan & Winters, 2010; Oriard, 2009). The rule was also greatly abused by college sport coaches. After all, remedial classes as well as courses outside the required core such as woodworking, physical education, and home economics counted towards the prospective college athletes' minimum high school GPA (Gurney, Tan & Winters, 2010; Oriard, 2009). Upon entering college, due to the lack of academic preparedness, many college athletes found that they had a low possibility of earning a degree (Klein & Bell, 1995).

2.00 Rule: In 1972, the NCAA approved freshman athletic eligibility. In 1973, the NCAA revoked the four-year athletic scholarship and instituted the one-year scholarship, which gave coaches more authority to constantly evaluate athletic talent rather than guarantee college athletes an education leading towards graduation (Falla, 1981; Ridpath, 2002). With the increase of freshman participation within college sport, the initial eligibility requirements faced reform once more. The 1.6 Rule was replaced by the 2.00 Rule in 1973 which required prospective college athletes to have a 2.00 minimum high school GPA to be eligible to participate in intercollegiate sport. Similar to the standards of the 1.6 Rule, the 2.00 Rule also accepted remedial as well as non-core content course work. Thus, like the 1.6 Rule, the 2.00 Rule did not prevent coaches from recruiting aca-

demically underprepared college athletes. Essentially, the 2.00 Rule allowed coaches to recruit almost any player regardless of academic merit (Klein & Bell, 1995; Ridpath, 2002; Ridpath et. al, 2007).

Also in 1972, college football became fully racially integrated. The opportunity to participate in collegiate athletics gave some African American students the chance at earning a college degree (Klein & Bell, 1995). Scholars such as Oriard (2009) believed that low initial eligibility standards led to the exploitation of African American college athletes because many minorities came from substandard primary education systems and were unprepared to do college level work much less than while being a busy athlete. It was also during this time that college administrators realized the large amount of revenue that could be made through television coverage of football games as well as the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament. Universities found themselves admitting athletes who had elementary reading levels, and thus, found it difficult to complete college assignments (Gurney, et. al, 2010, 2017; Ridpath, 2002; Ridpath, et. al, 2007). It was apparent "that schools were recruiting student-athletes who could contribute to their teams' success even if these students had a very little chance of graduating (Klein & Bell, 1995). To assist in the athletic eligibility of some African American athletes, they were given passing grades in their college classrooms that were not earned. African American athletes at institutions such as Utah and Arizona State were enrolled in summer school programs off-campus where neither course work nor classroom attendance was required (Oriard, 2009). At Georgia, no attempt was made to even educate the college athletes coming in academically underprepared, many whom were primarily African American males

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(Smith, 2011). Jan Kemp, a University of Georgia professor in the late 1970s complained when football players in remedial classes were given a passing grade to play in a bowl game, eventually lost her teaching position in retaliation and had to fight in the courts after blowing the whistle (Goldstein, 2008). Many African American college athletes, similar to those who struggled at Georgia, found themselves taking easy classes to maintain athletic eligibility; sadly, many of these classes were not applicable towards obtaining a college degree (Huff & Shapiro, 1977).

Proposition 48: In 1986, the NCAA approved Proposition 48. The new academic-eligibility legislation raised initial eligibility standards. Proposition 48 required prospective college athletes to have a 2.00 GPA in 11 core courses consisting of math, English, science, and history. Furthermore, the legislation required a minimum standardized test score of a combined 700 on the SAT or a composite 15 on the ACT (Ridpath, 2002; Smith, 2011). African American athletes were affected by the increased initial eligibility standards. Historically, African Americans have “been disadvantaged by standardized testing” (Klein & Bell, 1995, p. 20). Klein and Bell (1995) assert that the motivation behind the NCAA’s Proposition 48 standards was more racist than about academic primacy. This was alleged due to the hostility caused by the athletic dominance of African American college athletes while the governing enterprise was largely white male. In fact, “more than 75% of African American student-athletes had college admission test scores that were below the 25th percentile in the distribution of Caucasian scores” (p. 20). If Proposition 48 had gone into effect just two years prior, more than half of the African American college athletes (60%) and 40% of the African American football signing

class would have been declared ineligible. Within a year of initiating Proposition 48, the number of African Americans on athletic scholarship decreased by 4%. (Klein & Bell, 1995). Prop. 48 also introduced the “partial qualifier,” which allowed students who did not meet all of the standards to receive athletic aid and practice on the team, but not compete in the first year, which evolved to require students to have their standardized test score in a certain range under Proposition 16 (Rosen, 2000).

Proposition 16: A decade after Proposition 48 was passed, the NCAA once again changed the initial eligibility requirements for potential college athletes. Proposition 16, enacted in 1995, required prospective college athletes to have a 2.00 high school GPA, 13 core courses, and a combined score of 1010 on the SAT and an 86 sum score on the ACT (Yost, 2010). Proposition 16 did provide an exception to assist potential college athletes who may have a lower standardized test score. Students with a GPA of 2.5 or higher could qualify with a combined 820 on the SAT or a 68 sum score on the ACT. Those who opposed the legislation argue that it was unfair to compare students, when in fact prospective college athletes come from very diverse backgrounds. Others argued that minority students were placed at a disadvantage by being required to take a “mainstream oriented” standardized test. Once again, the NCAA was accused of discriminating against African American athletes (Oriard, 2009; Yost, 2010).

In 1999, a group of prospective African American college athletes from Philadelphia filed a class action lawsuit against the NCAA. In *Cureton vs. The NCAA*, the students challenged that the minimum standardized test scores that the NCAA required for athletic participation, on the basis that the standardized tests are racially biased. Essentially, because these potential

college athletes did not earn the minimum test score needed to receive qualifying status, the NCAA initial eligibility legislation cost these students the opportunity to participate in intercollegiate sport, and possibly even the chance to earn a college degree (*Cureton v. NCAA*, 1999). Although the court ruled in favor of the NCAA, this case was crucial in sparking yet another academic reform movement.

THE 2003 ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE PROGRAM LEGISLATION

The passing of Proposition 48 and 16 did not shed a positive light on the NCAA. Many felt that both policies were racially charged (Greene, 1984). After years of discussion and backlash, the NCAA enacted a new policy, the 2003 Academic Performance Program (APP). The legislation increased the number of core courses needed to become a qualifier from 11 to 14 (Gurney, Tan & Winters, 2010). Due to the ridicule the NCAA faced by requiring prospective college athletes to achieve a minimum standardized test score, the organization decided to do away with a required standardized test score. The initial eligibility index (also known as the sliding scale) replaced the minimum requirements for both high school GPA and standardized test scores. Basically, the sliding scale allowed prospective college athletes to qualify with a lower GPA to qualify with a higher standardized test score and vice versa. Theoretically, with a high enough GPA, a NCAA prospective athlete could be deemed a qualifier without answering a single question correctly on a standardized exam. This legislation eliminated the partial qualifier status that was introduced in 1995 (Bakker, 2006; Gurney, Tan & Winters, 2010).

Because of the flexibility of the sliding

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scale, cases of academic fraud increased. There are uncontrollable factors that can influence a student's ability to perform well on standardized exams. For example, students who attend private secondary institutions tend to score higher on standardized exams than those who attend public schools. Ethnicity, family income, and the education level of the student's parents are also factors that can influence a student's test score (The College Board, 2010). According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau (2010) data, African Americans have the lowest median household income of any ethnicity in the United States, and 20% of African Americans have a college degree, when compared to Caucasian individuals (39%). Based on this information, it can be inferred that African Americans are less likely to do well on standardized exams due to uncontrollable factors such as education level and income.

The need for some potential college athletes to earn a high GPA has led to grade inflation (The College Board, 2010). There have been instances of high school teachers' altering grades to ensure outstanding interscholastic athletes are eligible to compete, and ultimately have the necessary academic credentials to participate at the next level (Beem, 2006). A *New York Times* investigation revealed that former Kentucky basketball star Eric Bledsoe, who did not have the grades to meet NCAA initial eligibility standards, transferred high schools and increased his GPA from a 1.9 his junior year to a 2.5 his senior year. Through what is speculated to be grade tampering, Bledsoe met the minimum standards to be eligible for NCAA competition (Thamel & Evans, 2010). Essentially, because students with low test scores need a high GPA in order to become a NCAA qualifier, teachers are being paid or coerced into giving prospective college athletes grades that they did not earn (Yost, 2010).

In 2009, an investigation into the basketball program at the University of Memphis alleged that the university had knowledge regarding a former member on the men's basketball team (reportedly Derrick Rose) paying a student to take the SAT for him so he could meet NCAA initial eligibility standards (Seattle Sportsnet, 2009).

The 2003 NCAA legislation contributed the emergence of preparatory schools designed to establish eligibility. An investigation revealed that as many as 200 elite athletes enrolled at various prep schools within the last decade to earn a high school diploma while essentially doing little work outside of their sport (Thamel & Evans, 2009). These institutions attract talented players who may need additional assistance academically in order to meet the NCAA initial eligibility standards. Some of these prep schools, such as God's Academy in Irving, Texas, had 12 students enrolled. Ironically, the only students in the school are also on the basketball team. Furthermore, the school's only teacher was its head basketball coach. These prep schools are acting as diploma mills, ensuring that potential college athletes earn the grades needed in order to qualify for NCAA competition. Although the NCAA attempts to monitor high schools, it is impossible for the organization to examine every high school in the United States and even some abroad thoroughly (Ridpath, 2018; Thamel & Evans, 2009). Grade inflation is occurring, and some prospective college athletes are attending prep schools in order to gain eligibility.

Between 2004 and 2012, if a prospective college athlete failed to become a qualifier, the only option was to attend a junior college and earn an associate's degree prior to transferring to a NCAA Division I institution. However, in 2012, the NCAA created the academic redshirt. An academic redshirt allows athletes who

failed to meet the qualifier standards the ability to practice and receive athletics-based financial aid; however, academic redshirts must meet the initial eligibility index for academic redshirts in order to be certified (NCAA, 2019). This essentially is the partial qualifier status of the past. Academic redshirts are supposed to be solely focused on the transition to college-level work and their academics; however, they are able to participate in all practices, workouts, and required activities of team members which, given the commitment, takes away from time spent on academics.

2016 ACADEMIC REFORM LEGISLATION

In 2016, the NCAA again revised the initial eligibility qualifications required for athletic participation. The major differences in this present legislation compared to the 2003 requirements are an increase in the number of core courses required, as well as a time restriction in which core courses need to be completed. Presently, the current initial eligibility standards are:

- Completion of 16 core courses (4 years of English, 3 years of Math at Algebra I or higher, 2 years of Natural/Physical Science including on year of lab, 2 years of Social Science, and 4 years of additional courses including from any previous areas, foreign language, or comparative religion/philosophy)
- Ten of the 16 courses must be completed before the start of the senior year, 7 of which are in English, Math, or Natural/Physical Science
- The core-course GPA must be a 2.300 or higher
- The student meets a sliding scale minimum based on test score (SAT or ACT sum score) and GPA
- Graduation from high school (NCAA, 2018).

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Students who meet these standards are not necessarily set up for success in college. If an institution requires a 3.00 GPA from high school core courses, but admits an athlete with a 2.30, the student has a different level of academic preparedness than the other students in the classroom. As seen throughout its history, NCAA initial eligibility standards tend to be well below minimum admission standards for the general college student population at many U.S. institutions. These standards are rarely aligned with admissions policies, and prospective athletes at selective universities rarely are competitive with the general student body. The struggle for academic success leaves athletes vulnerable and susceptible to academic fraud. According to Gurney, Tan, and Winters, "This practice of admitting student-athletes with lower academic profiles than the general student body may have started a century's worth of tension between classrooms and playing fields" (2010, p. 479).

IMPACTS OF SPECIAL ADMISSIONS

Once the NCAA's national minimal academic standards for athletes were in place, institutions developed means of admitting and maintaining the eligibility of underprepared elite athletes. In 1982, Creighton University basketball player Kevin Ross made national headlines when it was revealed that he completed four years of competition while being kept eligible through a series of friendly professors and clever academic advising while never having learned how to read (*Ross v. Creighton University*, 1992). When Kevin was recruited, his ACT score was 9 of a possible 36 and gained admission through coaches' intense lobbying of the Creighton administration. When his eligibility was exhausted, Kevin dropped out of college and enrolled in elementary school to acquire basic learning skills. In 1989, Kevin sued the University

for educational malpractice and later settled out of court (Mount, 1989).

Dexter Manley, a popular professional football player admitted that he was functionally illiterate and kept eligible through his years of playing at Oklahoma State University (Smith, 2011). The college sport landscape is littered with similar stories. According to Gurney, Lopiano, and Zimbalist (2017), these stories are not outliers but rather the predictable outcomes of institutions seeking prestige and financial gain from winning performance of teams. Admitting athletic talent below institutional admissions standards gives colleges and universities a competitive edge in their zeal to get media exposure for athletic success.

After the famous "Hail Mary" pass of the 1984 Cotton Bowl in which Doug Flutie from Boston College threw a touchdown pass to receiver Gerard Phelan in the final six seconds of the game to defeat the heavily favored University of Miami Hurricanes, Boston College was launched from anonymity to national prominence. The college's boom in student applications, enrollment and donations became known as the "Flutie Effect" or "Flutie Factor" (Peterson-Horner & Eckstein, 2014). Since then, college presidents have seized opportunities to join the ranks of competitive major college sport in the quest for prominence (Gurney, Lopiano & Zimbalist, 2017). The gamble to attain glory from the Flutie Effect/Factor requires a tremendous investment in athletic facility infrastructure, exorbitant coaching salaries, operating expenses, as well as an army of tutors, learning specialists, advisors, and academic support services apart from those provided to the student body. If the wager pays off with winning football or men's basketball team, donors and trustees are content, and the president is lauded, though the Flutie Effect/Factor has been

shown to be temporary (Peterson-Horner & Eckstein, 2014).

The President of Georgia State University since 2009, Mark Becker, started a football program with the expressed intention of enhancing the reputation of the university. Becker emphasized that "great research universities tend to have great athletic programs," adding "the university is now complete" (Wolverton, Hallman, Shifflet & Kambhampati, 2015). To fund the pursuit of joining the ranks of competitive, big-time college sports, college presidents such as Becker typically resort to acquiring cash through mandatory student fees. A 2015 study found that public universities have pumped more than 10.3 billion dollars into college sports from student fees assessments and, by doing so, dramatically increased student debt. In the case of Georgia State, students subsidized 84% of the athletics program, totaling 100 million dollars (Wolverton, et. al, 2015). Even at America's best research institutions, college sports challenges its academic integrity and at times damages the reputation of institutions. Because a large gap exists between the admissions standards of the student body and those used for athletes, an environment ripe for compromising academic integrity is created. In 2014, Michigan's President Mark Schlissel described the University's admissions process for athletes as "we admit students who aren't as qualified... and it's probably the kids that we admit that can't honestly, even with lots of help, do the amount of work and the quality of work it takes to make progression from year to year (Shenouda, 2014, para. 3). Within two days, Schlissel hastily retracted his statement and formally apologized to the football coach (Fitzgerald, 2014). It appears that pressure from the Wolverine community triggered the hasty apology.

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College presidents are often aware of the admission of significantly unprepared athletes but display timidity about denying special admission of recruits. This shameful practice of college athlete exploitation has often been referred to as fostering a plantation system, a term that reflects how often these practices affect African American athletes (Hawkins, 2010).

More recent attempts have been made by presidents to control the expansion and gross commercialism of intercollegiate athletics. In 1989, in response to highly publicized academic scandals and low graduation rates of football and men's basketball players, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation formulated a commission of higher education leaders to respond to the threat posed by college sport. From the first report written, the commission identified the need for presidential control directed toward academic integrity. However, repeated scandals have demonstrated presidents' reticence to take appropriate preventive or corrective actions (About the Knight Commission, 2019).

When asked in March 2011 whether Gordon Gee, President of The Ohio State University had considered firing his head football coach Jim Tressel for violating NCAA rules, he responded, "No. Are you kidding? Let me be very clear. I'm just hopeful the coach doesn't dismiss me" (Wickersham, 2011, para. 5). Apart from the significant costs of student fees and student debt to fund major college football programs, there are the other real costs associated with the epidemic levels of academic dishonesty and its effects on institutional reputation. In an interview during the 2015 NCAA Convention, Vice-President for Enforcement Jonathan Duncan characterized the occurrence of academic dishonesty cases to be at an epidemic level (NCAA Investigates, 2015).

The well-documented two-decade long

scheme devised to keep athletes eligible at the highly selective University of North Carolina resulted in massive resignations and terminations of athletic department personnel, faculty, and university administrators including the Chancellor of the University. An investigation of the UNC academic scandal conducted by Kenneth Wainstein and colleagues found nearly 1,500 athletes took part in using fake classes that never met, yet yielded A or B letter grades to enhance their GPAs (Wainstein, Jay & Kukowski, 2014). The bills for the scandal tallied through 2018 totaled \$21 million for the cost of several investigations, legal fees and lawsuits, public relations firms, and records production.

College presidents are acutely aware of potential athletic academic fraud scandals both for securing admission to the university and for maintaining athletic eligibility. Examples of scandals involving both aspects are scattered throughout modern college history (Ridpath, Gurney & Snyder, 2015). In 2009, the University of Memphis' point guard Derrick Rose allegedly had someone else take his SAT for him in order to meet the NCAA eligibility standards (Katz, 2009). In 2014, *Chronicle of Higher Education* reporter Brad Wolverton exposed a widespread academic fraud scheme to ensure the eligibility of athletes at numerous prominent football and basketball programs. A community college basketball coach who doubled as a "fixer" enrolled in and took courses for hundreds of recruits or current athletes for a fee with the hope that his academic services might lead to a coaching position for a major basketball program (Wolverton, 2014).

Ineffectual leadership and stewardship have placed college presidents in an untenable but self-inflicted position to advance their presidential agendas. In a 2015 interview, William E. Kirwan, Co-Chair of the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate

Athletics, Chancellor of the University of Maryland System, and Past-President of both the University of Maryland and The Ohio State University, noted that during his 25-year tenure, college presidents have virtually relinquished control of athletics. He said, "It is the one area of a university where presidents are not really in control" (Woodhouse, 2015, para. 25). Kirwan added that the hands-off policy at most institutions has contributed to what he describes as a culture of excess among athletic departments: "There's sort of the façade of their being in control, but can you imagine a president of a big-time football power announcing they were going to de-emphasize intercollegiate athletics and concentrate more resources on academics? The board would get upset. The legislature would get upset. Alumni would get upset. They couldn't handle it" (Woodhouse, 2015, para. 26). To maintain a culture of winning and being competitive among peer and conference institutions, presidents must allow for specially admitted athletes.

The special admissions slots reserved for athletic admissions at highly selective universities created the opportunity for wealthy and celebrity parents to participate in the now famous bribery and fraud schemes to gain admission for their children in the 2019 Varsity Blues Scandal. This "side door" referenced by the mastermind William Singer was the vulnerable weak link to hide special admits by portraying them as athletes (Wang & Belier, 2019). It has attracted national headlines, public outrage and America's fascination with celebrity. Once again, intercollegiate athletics became the conduit for fraud as there was a lack of oversight within the colleges and universities. In a March 2019 federal indictment, elite institutions such as Georgetown, Yale, Stanford, and the University of Texas used athletic admissions

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slots to enroll non-athletes. For example, Georgetown University's acceptance rate for the Class of 2022 was 14.5 percent, the lowest in university history. That same year, Georgetown had a total of 158 special admits for athletes which is a significant number for an athletic program whose national reputation is built solely on basketball (Olsen, 2019). College presidents conveniently exercise plausible deniability of oversight of special admission for athletes. The practice of inserting non-athletes into athlete slots for wealthy donors' children is not a novel concept in the athletic world. The excessive number of admissions slots affords a ripe environment for wealthy donors to bribe coaches for coveted admissions slots (Olsen, 2019). Considering the impact of the University of North Carolina (UNC) academic scandal that unfolded in the early to mid-2010s, higher education administrators noted that through multiple investigations, UNC barely got a slap on the wrist if anything for its lack of oversight regarding academic fraud and the lack of a quality education. Initially, UNC was threatened by its accreditor and thought to receive similar penalties to Penn State after its scandal; however, the NCAA astoundingly did not find wrongdoing by UNC athletics or rule violations in this scandal (Osborn, 2017). This outcome led institutions, some of them considered the most elite in the nation, to continue with their status quo of lowering admissions standards for talented athletes. Given the lack of consequences UNC faced, there may have been an assumption by those involved with special admissions processes that this could go on forever and no one in the public would ever notice.

Since the Varsity Blues scandal was announced to the public on March 12, 2019, institutions have been scrambling to review internal processes and create checks and balances between admissions, the

president's office, development/advancement, and athletics (Pennington, 2019). Though it has been common practice for institutions to hold space for special admits even at elite institutions, no one thought to investigate if the profiles of students masquerading as athletes were accurate. This clever scheme rested on the assumption that admissions staff would never research individual applicants' backgrounds, which is uncommon in admissions generally.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The history of presidents' trepidation to seriously reform athletics and make it relevant to the institutional mission has essentially caused skyrocketing academic integrity issues in higher education. From the plans in the 1930s-1940s by presidents seeking to reform athletics to the numerous attempts at adjusting initial eligibility to something trying to resemble minimum standards, presidents' involvement in academic reform has seen limited impactful results. College athletes may not be receiving a meaningful, quality education in exchange for their athletic talents provided to their institutions. Students who are seeking access to institutions and meet their admissions standards may be denied the opportunity for advanced education because special admissions allowed for others who were not qualified to take up seats in an incoming freshman class. A blatant disregard for the missions of the institutions are dismissed in favor of the whims of big donors for winning teams.

The NCAA is a membership driven educational non-profit institution. While the NCAA has recently added five independent Board members, the governing body continues to maintain a vast majority of active college president Board members who represent the commercial interests of athletic directors, conference commission-

ers, and revenue producing coach lobbies (Osborn, 2014). Best practices for the governance of non-profits call for a majority of independent Board members. A path toward academic reform of the special admissions original sin will likely be resisted by the expanse of commercialism (Gurney, Lopiano & Zimbalist, 2017).

Though adding independent Board members was a move to show efforts to escape the power of the insular athletic bubble, this is just one small step that is not necessarily preventative of future scandal. True change toward a system that favors the college experience and strives for all college athletes to graduate will require a much more impactful set of actions. Athletic departments' and colleges' missions must align to focus on educating students, rather than winning championships. Presidents continue to be involved in NCAA and conference governance, so it is imperative that they take time to understand how college sports operates, and how its commercialization harms college athletes in their pursuit of a quality education. Presidents cannot defer their voting preferences on critical legislation to the likes of conference commissioners. They must consider how their students, who just happen to represent their institutions as talented athletes, might be better served as students. ●

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KU Athletics Announces Settlement With Ex-Football Coach

The University of Kansas has announced that “Kansas Athletics entered into a \$2.55 million financial settlement with former head football coach David Beaty, ending all litigation and disputes.”

Beaty was fired near the conclusion of the 2018 season, and subsequently sued the university. He alleged that the university used potential NCAA infractions as a way to avoid a \$3 million buyout per the terms of his contract.

The university held its ground in a statement.

“Despite the settlement, the University maintains that the facts

and principles behind its position remain intact,” it said. “For the betterment of KU, and driven by a willingness to move forward during a time of uncertainty in college athletics, the University has now put this matter behind us.”

Michael P. Lyons, a Dallas-based trial lawyer representing Beaty, told *The Topeka Capital-Journal* that Beaty and his family are pleased to have this matter resolved.

“This has been an extremely challenging time for David and Raynee Beaty,” he said. “I think this is a victory not only for the Beaty family but for college coaches

everywhere. The current trend of backtracking on your contractual obligations in an effort to find a way not to pay these contracted buyouts, I think not only is that a growing trend, but I think this is an example of what not to do. I think the settlement speaks for itself.”

Lyons added that his client “maintains that the allegations that precipitated this are contrived. David has never knowingly been involved in any NCAA violation in the history of his tenure as a coach in college football. Unfortunately for David he has to deal with the NCAA side of this now.” ●

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USC Disassociates Itself from Football Booster Who Made Anti-Protest Tweets

The University of Southern California has revoked the privileges of a booster, who made insensitive tweets. Basically, LAPD Union attorney Marla Brown tweeted out that protestors responding to police brutality “need to be shot.” Retribution was swift. USC Athletic Director Mike Bohn released a statement days later revoking her season ticket and Trojan Athletic Fund membership privileges.

“Following an immediate investigation into the matter, we informed the indi-

vidual that their season ticket and Trojan Athletic Fund membership privileges have been revoked and their payments will be promptly returned,” wrote Bohn. “Their account has been flagged in our system to prevent future purchases. Thank you to the USC community for helping us identify this individual so that we could move swiftly to terminate our relationship. We stand in solidarity with the Black community.”

NCAA Punishes Ex-Buffalo Coach for Forging Papers

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mer teammate’s signature and fabricating an email account to submit the statement are contrary to the membership’s well-established honesty and sportsmanship and ethical conduct legislation.”

University of Buffalo Athletic Director Mark Alnutt said NCAA rules compliance “is a top priority of our athletic department. ... As we continue to work toward a tradition of excellence, we will hold ourselves to the highest standard of ethical conduct and compliance.” ●