

Quantifying the Benefits of Intercollegiate Athletics Participation: Achievement Motivation, Self-Discipline, and Self-Esteem

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The organizational philosophy of housing intercollegiate athletics within the academy has largely been based upon the notion of athletics as a unique element of a holistic education. Scholars have referenced individual benefits of participation in competitive athletics (e.g. Adler & Adler, 1991; Bowen & Levin, 2003; Cooper & Weight, 2011; Irwin, Irwin, & Hays, 2011; Lapchick, 1987; NCAA, 2011; Vienna, 2001). To date, however, many of these benefits have not been quantified with empirical research, and the educational legitimacy of intercollegiate athletics has become an area of intense media and public scrutiny (e.g. Louthan, 2011; Richardson & McGlynn, 2011; Splitt, 2011; Thelin, 2011; Weight & Cooper, 2012). The purpose of this study was to examine achievement motivation, self-discipline, and self-esteem within a sample of active university students and student-athletes in an effort to quantify the legitimacy of athletics as an educational endeavor (Brand, 2009).

The late Myles Brand, former NCAA president and a vocal proponent of the educational value of intercollegiate athletics participation, believed the importance of intercollegiate athletics was significantly undervalued. Brand (2006) condemned the academy for its bias against bodily skills, non-art, and its view on athletics as an auxiliary to the university unworthy of subsidy. This view, the "Standard View", Brand (2006) argued, is at the root of many of the conceptual problems which have led to intense competitive pressure related to winning and the arms race of intercollegiate athletic expenditures (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010). To overcome this bias, Brand suggested an integrated view of intercollegiate athletics wherein athletics would be treated as an academic unit similar to the performing arts such as music, dance, or theatre, which have very similar structures. This structural and philosophical shift was intended to decrease the competitive pressure and associated detriments to the system, and the educational foundation of intercollegiate athletics could resurface as the fundamental purpose of athletics within higher education (Brand, 2006; Bowen & Levin, 2003). While most athletics administrators believe in the value of the intercollegiate athletics experience, it is difficult to promote this mission without data to support its current operational structure.

The research was conducted via survey methodology distributed online to male and female undergraduate students participating in required lifetime fitness courses (n = 400) and student-athletes currently participating on varsity athletics teams (n = 400) from three institutions representing the Big Ten, Atlantic Coast, and Southeastern conferences. Data utilized in this study will be compiled from an online instrument composed of standard demographic questions in addition to the established psychological scales of achievement motivation, self-discipline (Costa & McCrae, 1992), and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) which have been validated with high reliability coefficients and empirically tested validity.

Data analysis includes analysis of variance based on the dependent variables of achievement motivation, self-discipline, and self-esteem and independent variables of sex, class standing, GPA, race, and student-athlete/non-athlete status. Narratives will be independently qualified by two researchers through axial-coded categories. Inter-coder reliability of 0.90 will be sought. Chi square analysis may also be utilized to test the relationship between independent variables with the major themes identified.

As a segment within the academy that is largely publicly subsidized and highly scrutinized, this data will provide an exploratory view into the effect of intercollegiate athletics practices on select psychological variables. This research will add to the literature and help to provide a baseline for administrative and governmental decision making related to the allocation of resources during this particularly difficult fiscal time in the United States.