

The necessary allocation of pay and wages for the college athletes



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I grew up in a Pac 10 (now Pac 12) family, always cheering for the University of Arizona basketball team. In high school on Friday nights I could often be found at the University of Denver hockey team, cheering in the icy air. I considered the sport atmosphere a significant factor in deciding where to spend my undergraduate career. College sports have been a great source of enjoyment and entertainment throughout my life, but I do not believe that student athletes should be paid. The value of a funded college education serving as enough compensation, the distraction from the primary purpose of attending college, and the disparities that are likely to result if college athletes are paid are all reasons to not monetarily compensate college athletes.

In 2012, over 70% of college graduates leave with more than just a degree – they leave with burdening debt (Ellis 2013). The average student loan debt in 2012 was \$29, 000 and college is not getting any cheaper (Ellis 2013). Additionally, the college degree has grown more and more necessary for getting even an average paying job, with those with a college degree earning 98% more per hour than those without one (Leonhardt 2014). So, having a college education fully funded is a very valuable thing – I believe this is definitely enough compensation for even the hardest working college athletes. Most college athletes do not go on to be professional athletes, so they will of course need to seek other job opportunities. Athletic scholarships allow many young students to earn a degree and find work outside of the athletic world upon graduation; this is immeasurably valuable for it results in thousands of dollars more in yearly income than the jobs available to those without college degrees.

Vanderbilt University, according to US News and World Report, is the 15th best school to attend in the United States. Calculating tuition, room and board, meal plan, and books, a four-year Vanderbilt education is worth upwards of \$272, 000. In addition to having this covered, Vanderbilt athletes receive medical care, gear, and clothing. At Vanderbilt, the athletic department has its own counselor with availability far greater than that of the Psychological and Counseling Center that serves the general population. Our athletes travel all over the country, free of cost, and are excused from class to do so. Our football team is often on ESPN, giving the players national recognition. The athletes at Vanderbilt University are rewarded for their talents and hard work by receiving a world-class college degree as well as benefits through the athletic department - and they do not even have to win. Further compensation would be excessive and take money away from other areas of the school, such as the actual academics.

Steve Berkowitz of USA news reports on how most Division I athletic departments in the NCAA receive subsidies - even when they can run self-sufficiently (2013). This truly raises the question of how money should be allocated in schools and a closer look should be taken at the amount of money the athletic departments receive. One study reveals, " the highest paid public employee in all but 11 states is a college football or basketball coach" (Kingkade, 2014). This highlights just how much money is going to these programs and paying college athletes would only mean more money for athletics. The argument is often made that these sports programs bring in a great deal of money for schools, often in the millions. However, I believe the issue must be viewed from a functionalist perspective to explain why the

high profits made by big college sports does not mean the athletes should receive payment.

Colleges and universities serve a myriad of functions in today's society; the important question is which functions are most important. Certainly, one function of college is to provide a space for athletics and those who want to play sports, but few would say this is the primary function of the higher education system. The main functions for college are encouraging learning and education, socializing young adults, and job preparation. Stevenson and Nixon make the argument that sport functions to aid socialization, so in this way athletics at schools do serve one of the main functions of the college education (1972). For the few college athletes that go on to professional sports, athletics serve for job preparation; however, most athletes fulfill this function in the classroom rather than on the field. Since sports do not fulfill the major functions of attending a college or university, it is unnecessary to provide student athletes a salary; paying the athletes would encourage them to focus more on the sport and less on school.

The film *Schooled: The Price of College Sports* addresses the disconnect between college athletes' sport career and education. In the movie, Jeff Locke, a baseball player, discusses how strict NCAA rules mean controlling eligibility for athletes to play their sport. This is dangerous because it means that if some athletes lose their eligibility or can no longer play their sport then they are in danger of losing their college education. This forces student-athletes to focus more on being athletes and less on being students - again contrasting the function that college serves. While I agree that college-athletes should have a voice if they are being treated unfairly, I disagree

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with the opinion presented in Schooled that the athletes should be paid for participating in the business of college sports. Giving a salary to the athletes will not solve the problem of ill-preparing them for a world outside of sport nor will it solve the issue of athletics taking students away from focusing on school. If non-professional college athletes are to be paid for their time on the court or field (or bowling alleys) then perhaps it would be better to simply separate the athletics from colleges. The marriage of sports and school is a complication to higher education and if these athletes are to be paid then perhaps they could instead use that money to pay for their education, rather than having both a funded education and a salary.

A further problem with paying student-athletes is determining how much to pay each athlete. Does the best scoring football player earn more than an average woman tennis player? This is likely to become a tricky gender issue. Male sports, specifically basketball and football, bring in far more money than female sports. It seems unlikely that a school will pay as much to small female sports, such as Vanderbilt's bowling team, that actually cost the school money to retain, than the big revenue male sports. Professional female athletes are paid significantly less than professional male athletes and it seems unlikely that salaries at the college level would change this. It is the male college sports that bring in viewers, fans, and money, but paying them more than female athletes would perpetuate the issue of pay inequality and gender inequality as a whole. Furthermore, there is a clear problem with sexual assault and male athletes, including prominent athletes being protected because of their elite sport status. Often it has been recorded that college women are discouraged from reporting sexual assault

by an athlete because it could negatively impact the team. The male group mentality that fosters inappropriate sexual behavior is perpetuated by sport; this was a problem at Vanderbilt University and is a noticeable problem at schools across the nation. By paying male athletes, almost surely more than female athletes, it is likely to elevate their feelings of superiority and infallibility. Female athletes need no further reason to be made to feel inferior to their male counterparts.

I suffer from arthritis and suffered a serious hip injury in high school, knocking me out of the athletic world permanently and leaving me to take out student loans to help pay for my college education. Having a fully paid college education is an enormous benefit that college athletes receive for playing sports and has value far beyond that of monetary benefits. It would be excessive to pay amateur athletes beyond this and would additionally lead to major issues regarding gender equality in universities. College serves as a place for education and enlightenment and sport should be seen as a way to receive this education, not as a job with an added burden of going to class. Paying college athletes would be detrimental to both the higher education system and the athletic world.