

Gaining equality in all the wrong areas: An analysis of academic clustering in women's Division I basketball

Amanda L. Paule, Bowling Green State University

When collegiate coaches recruit potential athletes, the athletes are often promised the chance to fulfill their dreams of playing college sport and get an education. The chance to pursue a wide variety of majors and the academic reputation of the university are often used to entice recruits to choose to attend that specific university (Paule, 2008). However, are the collegiate athletes really free to pursue any major they desire or are they steered toward specific majors in an effort to keep athletes eligible and in compliance with the NCAA's rules about progress toward degree completion?

The NCAA's 40-60-80 rule states that an athlete must complete 40% of their degree by the end of their second year or 4 semesters, 60% by the end of their third year or 6 semesters, and 80% by the end of the fourth year or eight semesters. If an athlete does not meet these requirements, he or she is ruled ineligible to compete (NCAA, 2002). This rule, while intended to increase retention and graduation rates, may have inadvertently caused coaches and academic advisors to cluster athletes into majors that are not as academically rigorous or contain "friendly faculty" (Brady, 2008).

Clustering is when 25% or more of an athletic team are in the same academic major (Case, Greer, & Brown, 1987). Clustering has been shown to occur in ACC football (Fountain & Finley, 2009), however, there has not been research into whether clustering is occurring in women's sports. The purpose of this study was to examine if female basketball players are being clustered into specific majors. Women's basketball has become on par with other "revenue producing" sports at some universities with the amount of money generated from their teams and the Women's March Madness basketball tournament. The 2008-09 media guides from all of the Division I women's basketball teams were used to determine the academic majors of the athletes. Results of this study showed that 94 out of the 340 Division I universities with women's basketball had academic clustering. Thus, in striving for equality between men's and women's sports, it seems that women's sports are also gaining equality in unintended areas.