

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

Amanda L. Paule, Ph.D.
Bowling Green State University

Introduction

- ◉ 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).
- ◉ Are the collegiate athletes really free to pursue any major they desire or are they steered toward specific majors?

What is Clustering

- Clustering is when 25% or more of an athletic team are in the same academic major (Case, Greer, & Brown, 1987).

Previous Literature

- ◎ Lederman (2003)
 - > Compared the percentage of football players in academic majors to the total percentage of undergraduates in that major on several campuses
 - > The results showed a large concentration of football players in majors that few other undergraduates selected
 - Ex. At Auburn 26% of the football team majored in sociology compared to only 0.3% of the entire undergraduate population
 - > Great disparity when comparing football players with the undergraduate population in each major

Previous Literature

- ◎ Fountain and Finley (2009)
 - > Examined clustering in ACC football programs
 - > Reported that 11 out of 12 football program in the ACC had at least one major athletes were clustered into.
 - > The other school in the conference did not report athlete majors.
 - > Black athletes were clustered into majors at a higher rate than their White counterparts.

Statement of the Problem

- ④ Pressure to increase graduation rates and retention can lead to athletes being clustered into majors that are not as academically rigorous or contain “friendly faculty” (Brady, 2008).
- ④ A majority of collegiate athletes will not go on to play professional athletics (Eitzen & Sage, 2009), therefore, the significance of obtaining an education and acquiring a degree cannot be understated.

Purpose of Study

- ⦿ 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.

Method

- 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.
- If there was no major listed in the media guide, the online player pages were used.

Method

- ⦿ Athletes listed as undeclared or undecided were not used in calculating clustering numbers.
- ⦿ There had to be at least 9 usable athletes on a team to be analyzed for clustering.
- ⦿ Contacted universities to identify the percentage of undergraduate students in majors in which athletes were clustered.

Results

- ◎ 94 out of 340 (or 31.3%) Division I universities with women's basketball had academic clustering
 - > 129 Schools NOT used due to lack of usable athletes or no majors listed in the media guide
- ◎ 94 out of 211 (or 44.5%) usable Division I universities with women's basketball had academic clustering

Top Clustering Schools

Name of University	Conference	Clustered Major	Percentage	No. Athletes in Major (#/#)	Total Usable Athletes
Boston College	Atlantic Coast	Arts & Sciences	67%	6	9
Maryland	Atlantic Coast	College of Letters and Sciences	67%	8	12
Connecticut	Big East	Exploratory Studies General Studies	64%	9	14
Wagner	Northeast	Sociology	60%	6	10
Buffalo	Mid-American	Exercise Science	56%	5	9
New Jersey Institute of Technology	Division I Independents	Business / Management	50%	6	12
Savannah St.	Division I Independents	Biology	50%	5	10
Stony Brook	America East	Arts & Sciences	50%	6	12
Texas Tech	Big 12	Human Development and Family Studies	46%	6	13
Sacred Heart	Northeast	Business	44%	4	9
TCU	Mountain West	Communications	44%	4	9
UNLV	Mountain West	University Studies	44%	4	9
Binghamton	America East	College of Arts & Sciences	43%	6	14
Boise St.	Western Athletic	Communication	43%	6	14
James Madison	Colonial	Kinesiology	42%	5	12
Mercer	Atlantic Sun	Communication	41%	7	17
Long Beach St.	Big West	Communications	40%	4	10
Long Island	Northeast	Business Management	40%	4	10
University of Arkansas - Little Rock	Sun Belt	Health Science	40%	4	10

Comparing Athletes with Non-athletes

Name of University	Clustered Major	Percentage	No. Athletes in Major (###)	Total Athletes	Percentage of Undergrads in major
Boston College	Arts & Sciences	67%	6	9	66.90%
Maryland	College of Letters and Sciences	67%	8	12	14%
Connecticut	Exploratory Studies General Studies	64%	9	14	4.70%
Wagner	Sociology	60%	6	10	No Data Available
Buffalo	Exercise Science	56%	5	9	3.50%
New Jersey Institute of Technology	Business / Management	50%	6	12	No Data Available
Savannah St.	Biology	50%	5	10	No Data Available
Stony Brook	Arts & Sciences	50%	6	12	21.70%
Texas Tech	Human Development and Family Studies	46%	6	13	2.60%
Sacred Heart	Business	44%	4	9	
TCU	Communications	44%	4	9	4.70%
UNLV	University Studies	44%	4	9	3.20%
Binghamton	College of Arts & Sciences	43%	6	14	66.50%
Boise St.	Communication	43%	6	14	3.40%
James Madison	Kinesiology	42%	5	12	4.70%
Mercer	Communication	41%	7	17	0.20%
Long Beach St.	Communications	40%	4	10	3.80%
Long Island	Business Management	40%	4	10	No Data Available
University of Arkansas - Little Rock	Health Science	40%	4	10	3.20%

Discussion

- ⦿ Substantial difference between athletes and non-athletes in most of the clustered majors
- ⦿ Size of school, success of the athletic program, and conference affiliation did not impact if clustering occurred
- ⦿ Occurrences of academic clustering may even be greater than reported
 - Large number of freshman and sophomores listed as undecided/undeclared and universities that do not print academic majors of their athletes

Implications

- ◉ Life after college
- ◉ If pressure to increase graduation rates continues, it can be assumed clustering rates will continue to grow
- ◉ Academic integrity issues