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ARTICLE

Athletic Success and NCAA Profit-Athletes' Adjusted Graduation Gaps

Richard M. Southall
University of South Carolina

E. Woodrow Eckard
University of Colorado

Mark S. Nagel
University of South Carolina

Morgan H. Randall
University of Kentucky

Within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) and Division I men's basketball many *profit-athletes* travel to *Predominately White Institution* (PWI) work sites for "pre-professional" sport opportunities. At most PWIs the Black male student population is less than ten percent, while football and men's basketball rosters are overwhelmingly comprised of Black athletes. This study—using multiple regression models—examines the relationship between athletic success and profit-athletes' graduation rates. The main dependent variable is the *Adjusted Graduation Gap* (AGG) as a measure of academic success. Results indicated Black profit-athletes who play for the most successful FBS football and NCAA D-I men's basketball programs graduate at significantly lower rates than full-time male students. However, at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Black football and men's basketball players graduate at higher rates than full-time male students.

Au sein de la Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) et du basket-ball masculin de la Division 1 de la National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), beaucoup d'athlètes rapportent énormément d'argent à leur université en se joignant à des institutions majoritairement blanches afin de bénéficier d'opportunités sportives « pré-professionnelles ». Dans la plupart de ces institutions, la population étudiante

Southall and Nagel are with the Department of Sport and Entertainment Management, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC. Eckard is with the Business School, University of Colorado, Denver. Randall is with the School of Medicine, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY. Address author correspondence to Richard Southall at southall@hrsm.sc.edu.

noire masculine est de moins de 10 pourcent alors que les alignements des équipes de football et de basket-ball masculin sont largement dominés par les athlètes noirs. Cette étude qui utilise des modèles de régression multiple examine la relation entre succès sportif et taux de graduation de ces athlètes à profit. La principale variable dépendante est l'écart de graduation ajustée comme mesure de succès académique. Les résultats indiquent que ces athlètes à profit noirs qui jouent pour les programmes de football et de basket-ball qui ont le plus de succès graduent à des taux significativement plus bas que les étudiants masculins à temps plein. En revanche, dans les universités et collèges historiquement noirs, les joueurs de football et de basket-ball masculins noirs graduent à des taux plus élevés que les étudiants masculins à temps plein.

Most likely, NCAA FBS football fans outside Tulsa, OK overlooked a January 31, 2010 article: *Star Search: Why the South is King* on the *Tulsa World's* website. However, the article's third paragraph contained an important statistic: three Southern states (Texas [1], Florida [3], and Georgia [5]) were among the top five FBS football-player producing states (Baker, 2010; Stancil, 2014b). In addition, on a per-capita basis, six Southern states were listed among the country's top-ten FBS football-player producing states (Louisiana [2], Florida [3], Alabama [4], Georgia [5], Texas [6], and Mississippi [8]) (Baker, 2010), with several Southern states (i.e., Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee) identified as turning out the most men's basketball players (Stancil, 2014a).

Football and men's basketball rosters at NCAA D-I universities across the United States are replete with players who migrate from these recruiting "hotbeds"—as well as California and several other urban enclaves (Bacon, 2012; Weathersby, 2013). For example, in 2013 at the University of Kentucky 40 of 123 football players (32.5%) were from Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Texas (ESPN, 2013). Similar migration patterns are evident on rosters across the U.S., including emerging football powers such as Boise State, where 51% of players (45 of 88) come from California or Texas (Boise State Broncos, 2013). A similar pattern emerges in men's basketball. Two examples from the 2013–2014 season are the University of Oregon, with 8 of 17 players (47%) from California, Nevada and Texas; and the University of New Mexico, which has only two players from New Mexico on its roster (University of Oregon, 2014; University of New Mexico, 2014).

According to the most-recent U.S. Census data, the six Southern states listed above are also among the most-poverty ridden, with on-average 25.86% of their children living in poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2009b). In addition, all these states have educational attainment rankings (i.e., percent of persons 25 years and over who have completed bachelor's or advanced degrees) below the national average (38.2%), with three states (Mississippi [2], Louisiana [5], Alabama [6]) among the 10 lowest educational attainment states (United States Census Bureau, 2009a). In such an environment, many big-time college football and basketball recruits, the majority of whom are African American (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2010), are motivated to migrate to *Predominately White Institutions* (PWIs)[1] and work hard in hopes of achieving their National Football League (NFL) or National Basketball Association (NBA) dreams.

The present paper focuses on the resulting academic performance of profit-athletes at PWIs, as measured by their graduation rates relative to those of the

general male student body. In particular, we examine the hypothesis that athletes at more highly ranked schools (reflective of an emphasis on winning) graduate at lower rates (i.e., these schools accept a trade-off between athletic performance and academic performance). Separate statistical analyses are conducted for Black and White athletes, as theory suggests the former may be particularly susceptible to exploitation—based on their having less access to an education (reflected in lower graduation rates). Importantly, the general student body graduation rate is adjusted for the significant presence of part-time students at many schools to assure an "apples-to-apples" comparison with athletes, who are required by the NCAA to be full-time students.

Profit Athletes as Migrant Laborers

Two theoretical frameworks—Hawkins' (2010) neocolonial model and Southall and Weiler's (2014) company town metaphor—both detail the manner in which NCAA D-I *profit-athletes*[2] are forced to migrate to PWI work sites for the primary purpose of exchanging their athletic labor for short-lived "pre-professional" sport opportunities (Wieberg, 2011). While Hawkins (2010) viewed PWI athletic departments as akin to neo-colonial plantations on which profit-athlete "slaves" are subjugated and controlled by their overseers through physical and psychological coercion, Southall and Weiler (2014) propose NCAA profit-athletes are company-town laborers. This metaphor is based not only upon several structural similarities between NCAA athletic departments and 19th and 20th Century company-towns, but also profit-athletes' migration patterns, the manner in which athletic departments monitor and control athletes' behavior and movement, grant-in-aids as approved noncash compensation, limited athlete representation, associated college-sport health risks, and the justification of the collegiate model of athletics through moral and character-based justifications.

Similar to migrant laborers in other industries, many profit-athletes oscillate between two cultures (i.e., home and work sites) with their ultimate goal being returning home at the conclusion of a short-term professional sport career with enough money to take care of family members (Hawkins, 2010; Randall, 2010; Philpott, 1978; Southall & Weiler, 2014; Stichter, 1985; Wilson, 1972). Revealingly, 32% of the FBS football players in Randall's (2010) ethnographic study reported strong familial expectations of an NFL career. The pressure to succeed athletically to improve their family's economic status is a primary motivational factor for many players. As one respondent in Randall's study noted: "I think about my mom and stuff, like, I have to do what's for her 'cause she did a lot for me" (2010, p. 21).

In addition, migrant laborers often are not solely accountable for their migration. Migration decisions often involve the migrant, his family, and some group of nonmigrants (e.g., college recruiter, high school coach, or family advisor). For the migrant college football player the expected process of shared costs and returns is explicitly spelled out in contractual arrangements between the athlete and the various college-sport entities (e.g., NCAA Eligibility Center, National Letter of Intent [NLI], and university admissions offices). The rigid and controlled nature of the dictated terms (e.g., contained in the NCAA Student-Athlete Statement), clearly reflect the PWIs' dominant bargaining position.

In addition to home and work sites often being geographically distant, they are often culturally distinct. The home site includes family and friends of similar social and cultural origins, while the work-site is often characterized by unfamiliar social and cultural expressions. NCAA reports, such as the *2009–10 Student-Athlete Race and Ethnicity Report*, document the stratified nature of NCAA D-I athletics, as well as that African Americans comprise the highest percentage of players in NCAA FBS football (NCAA, 2010). The study reported NCAA D-I Black male athletes also are highly clustered in basketball (60.9%). The report highlighted Black males' low participation rates in sports other than FBS football, men's basketball, and track & field (NCAA, 2010). By contrast, Black males account for just 2.8% of full-time, degree-seeking undergraduate college students (Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013; Southall, Hawkins, and Polite (2012). Thus, while a majority of their teammates may be culturally and socially similar, profit-athletes are most often a small minority within a larger PWI setting. The *Football Performance Center* (FBC) at the University of Oregon is a stark example of profit-athletes' systemic isolation. While an opulent facility, the FBC also notably contains "…a locker room that can [only] be accessed by biometric thumbprints" (Bishop, 2013, para. 2).

Over the past several decades, several studies have examined college athletes' socialization, which encourages what is known as *role engulfment* (e.g., when an individual becomes engulfed in or inordinately focused on one role, to the detriment of other roles) (Adler & Adler, 1989, 1991; Edwards, 2000, Beamon & Bell, 2002, 2006). Edwards (2000) contended such athletic role engulfment is prevalent among African American male athletes for several reasons:

> (1) a long-standing, widely held, racist, and ill-informed presumption of innate, race-linked black athletic superiority and intellectual deficiency; (2) media propaganda portraying sports as a broadly accessible route to black social and economic mobility; and (3) a lack of comparably visible, high-prestige black role models beyond the sports arena (p. 9).

Harris (1994) and Hawkins (2010) noted parents and significant role models, especially in lower socioeconomic home sites, who intentionally and intensively socialize African-American males into focusing on athletics, encourage such role engulfment. Consequently, role engulfment disproportionately occurs among oscillating profit-athletes from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and manifests itself in larger adjusted graduation gaps among Black players within more successful football programs.

Reflecting the impact of the different cultural and social environments within athletic-department work sites, profit-athletes are monitored and scrutinized by athletic department staff and coaches much more than regular students are by university administrators. For example, athletes' social-media usage is closely tracked and restricted, with many member institutions feeling pressure to "monitor their student-athletes' online activity to demonstrate effective oversight that will stand up to scrutiny if ever faced with allegations of significant violations of NCAA rules" (Hosick, 2013, para. 2). Athletic department staff members view such intrusions into players' privacy as accepted "best practices." As an Associate Athletic Director for [NCAA] Compliance said, "We do monitor it, and we tell them we're doing it…. We're not going to bury our heads in the sand" (Hosick, 2013, para.

18). Profit-athletes no doubt face increased public scrutiny. Nevertheless, athletic administrators' motives for such monitoring have at least as much to do with protecting the athletic department brand, as addressing athletes' privacy concerns.

In addition to monitoring their social media activities, some PWI athletic departments track profit-athletes' (but not all athletes) personal spending habits. The Ohio State University (OSU) athletic department began such targeted scrutiny in 2012 (Bishop, 2013). The practice, undertaken in response to the "scandalous" action of football players exchanging OSU memorabilia for free tattoos, was described by OSU's athletic director (Gene Smith) as a "common sense" policy, since there are so many different ways to run afoul of NCAA rules against impermissible benefits to athletes (Bishop, 2013).

As Adler and Adler (1991) noted, big-time college sport's insularity tends to—in important respects—result in profit-athletes being physically, culturally, and socially isolated from other students: eating, training, and studying separate from the general student body (Bishop, 2013; Uthman, 2013). This isolation is compounded by their long workweeks, during which profit athletes recount spending an average of 39–43 hours per week on athletic activities (NCAA, 2011), i.e., equivalent to a full-time job. Randall's (2010) football players reported football activities consumed over 50% of their time. Similar to the isolation of migrant workers in other industrial settings, PWI football and men's basketball programs are examples of Goffman's (1961) *total institution*—a place of residence and work in which "…a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life" (p. xv).

The oscillating migrant labor status of many profit-athletes was encapsulated in a comment attributed to the publisher of a recruiting publication: *SuperPrep Magazine*, who said, "…a lot of these kids are looking for a better life" (Baker, 2010, para. 15). Ironically, given the history of migrant labor in the United States, in some cases, language used to defend the collegiate model of athletics glorifies this athletic "hunger" (B. Curry, personal communication, April 17, 2013). Consequently, many have argued the fundamental "economic" rationales for the relationship between profit-athletes and PWI athletic departments are professional sport opportunities for the profit-athletes, and revenue generation and marketing opportunities for PWIs (Baker, 2010; Byers & Hammer, 1995; Clotfelter, 2011; DeBrock, Hendricks, & Koenker, 1996; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Zimbalist, 1999).

For all college athletes, athletics potentially provides a dual benefit: a chance to continue their athletic careers, while also obtaining a college degree. However, some profit-athletes view their athletic talents as also providing a more immediate opportunity to dramatically improve their families' socioeconomic status (Ferrari, n. d.; Makuhari Media Production, 2013; Morris, 2014). To realize these economic and/or educational gains, players (often rural and many times Black) must migrate to "distant" colleges and universities and barter their athletic abilities in exchange for an athletic grant-in-aid (Hawkins, 2010, Southall, Hawkins et al., 2012).

What emerges from a review of the literature is a research setting in which NCAA profit-athletes are disproportionately recruited from areas with lower socioeconomic and educational-attainment statistics, clustered in specific majors to maintain eligibility (Fountain & Finley, 2009; Fountain & Finley, 2011; Sack, Park, & Thiel, 2011), graduate at lower rates than other college athletes (Lapchick, Donovan, & Pierson, 2013; Lapchick, Harrison & Bukstein, 2014), and do not

graduate at rates comparable to other full-time students (Southall, 2012; Southall, Eckard, Nagel, Blake, & Keith, 2013; Southall, Eckard, Exton, Nagel, & Blake, 2013a; Southall, Eckard, Exton, Nagel, & Blake, 2013b; and Southall, Eckard, Nagel, Keith, & Blake, 2014). This analysis examined the relationship between NCAA D-I football and men's basketball team rankings (i.e., athletic success) and profit-athlete *adjusted graduation gaps* (defined below).

Graduation Rates

Although there had been periodic public discussions and various lawsuits in the 1950s–1970s regarding college athletes' academic performance, it was not until the mid-1980s that media began consistently covering low graduation rates among big-time college football and men's basketball players (Byers & Hammer, 1995; *Hall v. University of Minnesota*, 1982; Michener, 1976; and *Ross v Creighton University*, 1992). For example, Nyad (1989) reported that 76–92% of professional football and men's basketball players lacked college degrees. In addition, several high profile cases of functionally illiterate athletes spurred Congressional action, with former Oklahoma State University (OSU) defensive end Dexter Manley perhaps being the most famous. Manley testified before Congress that despite being enrolled and playing football at OSU for four years, he had not learned to read until well after he had left college (Jacobson, 1992). Subsequently, the *1990 Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act* included a Department of Education (DOE) administered program through which colleges and universities collected and disseminated student graduation rates, commonly known as the Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) (See National Center for Educational Statistics website: http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/).

Concurrent with this increased public scrutiny, the NCAA conducted and published several athlete graduation-rate research projects, including a longitudinal NCAA Academic Performance Study (APS), which began in 1985 (NCAA, 1994). One of the first reports, published in 1991, highlighted the five-year graduation rates of a sample of NCAA athletes ($N = 3{,}288$) who "…entered NCAA Division-I institutions in the fall semester of 1984 or 1985" (NCAA, 1991, p. 6). The employed methodology was similar to the one eventually used in the six-year FGR and resulted in a graduation rate of 42.1% (NCAA, 1991, p. 6).

Federal Graduation Rate

The FGR straightforwardly calculates how many first-time, full-time students (e.g., enrolling at an institution as a first-year student) earn a baccalaureate degree at that institution within six years of enrolling. The FGR is the only easily available survey based on longitudinal student experiences. Though not foolproof or exhaustive, the FGR is one analytic tool of several available to assess students' educational attainment. It is designed to report the academic performance and retention rates of all students. It is one metric that can be used to ascertain the degree to which NCAA members are fulfilling their mission of maintaining college athletes as an integral part of higher education.[3] While graduation rates may be an imperfect measure of academic performance, they constitute the only publically available measure that allows a comparison between athletes and the general student body.

The FGR—as does any statistic—has sampling and methodological limitations. It counts students (including athletes) who transfer in or out of a school as not graduating. In addition, Eckard (2010) noted the FGR is positively biased toward universities with more full-time students, since it doesn't account for the reality that a percentage of students included in the initial FGR cohort will change from full- to part-time status. This bias is relevant in graduation-rate analysis, since part-time students graduate (within six years) at significantly lower rates than full-time students. As a result, a school's FGR may be adversely affected if it serves a "non-traditional" student population comprised of a great number of part-time students. Such a school will have a lower FGR than a university with a high percentage of full-time students (who graduate in the traditional timeframe of four to five years). This in turn creates an artificially more favorable comparison with athletes' FGRs.

Adjusted Graduation Gap

Based upon Eckard's (2010)-regression model, the Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG), accounts for part-time students included in the general student body FGR samples. Consequently, the AGG compares graduation rates of all full-time male students, Black and White combined, on NCAA Division-I campuses with those of NCAA D-I athletes. The AGG does not replace the FGR or any other metric, but allows for a comparison of college athletes' FGRs with a full-time student cohort.

This is relevant, because as was mentioned above, at many schools the general student body includes a significant number of part-time students. In fact, according to one source, nationally only 4 in 10 students at public campuses and only 25% of college students across the board go to school full time (Complete College America, 2011). And part-time students' graduation rates are much lower than those of full-time students: 24%, even when taking eight years to finish (deVise, 2011). Furthermore, because college athletes must enroll full time to maintain their eligibility, it is legitimate to compare their FGR with the graduation rate of full-time peers in the general student population. The AGG compensates for this downward (part-time) bias through regression-based adjustments based on the percentage of part-time students as reported to the National Center for Educational Statistics and compiled in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (National Center for Educational Statistics, n. d.). Consequently, the AGG allows for an "apples to apples" comparison between full-time athlete and full-time student cohorts.

Method

This study sought to determine if there was a relationship between athletic success and profit-athletes' AGGs. Our investigation was informed by several elements. First, PWIs operating with the expectation of high-level athletic performance are under greater pressure to win, and therefore may "cut corners" and compromise their academic standards in both recruiting and admissions (see Barrett, 2014; Scherzagier, 2009). In addition, PWI football and men's basketball programs demand (either implicitly or explicitly) profit-athletes allocate more time to their sport rather than academics (McCormick & McCormick, 2006; NCAA 2011; Eckard, 2010; Southall & Weiler, 2014). Consequently, a common criticism of athletic-academic support programs for profit-athletes is they focus on maintaining

academic eligibility rather than providing an opportunity for an education equal to that afforded other students (Gurney & Southall, 2013).[4]

As past and recent athletic/academic scandals at NCAA member universities attest, the tension between maintaining eligibility and providing access to an education is part of the collegiate model. The current athletic-academic support model is fundamentally designed to insure profit-athletes retain their eligibility and either graduate or leave the university as "eligible dropouts" in good academic standing (NCAA, 1991). To insure this rebranded definition of academic success (Southall, 2014), academic advisers, tutors, and learning specialists staff exclusive athlete-only academic support facilities, many of which cost many millions of dollars to construct and operate. In addition, many departments hire "class checkers" to follow athletes to class and take roll. FBS athletic department academic-support budgets now range between 1–2.6 million dollars (Gurney & Southall, 2013). Such academic support is fundamentally designed to manage underprepared athletes needing significant remediation. As learning specialists continue to demonstrate, with close, isolated supervision—as well as massive remedial and tutorial assistance—profit-athletes can remain eligible.

Given these structural characteristics of the NCAA's collegiate model (Southall & Staurowsky, 2013), we theorize a significant percentage of profit-athletes stay eligible, but do not graduate at rates comparable to the full-time male general student body. This suggests a testable hypothesis that the team-rankings measure we discuss below (used as a proxy for athletic success) should be negatively correlated with profit-athlete graduation rates. In other words, the AGG between profit-athletes and the full-time male student body should be larger in absolute value (more negative) for more highly ranked teams that have more successfully recruited players from football and men's basketball hotbeds (see Bacon [2012] and Weathersby [2013]).

We tested this hypothesis using multiple regression models, as described below. Separate analyses were conducted for NCAA FBS football and NCAA Division-I men's basketball. In addition, for each sport, separate analyses were conducted for two cohorts of athletes (2004 and 2005). This assures that the results are not idiosyncratic to a particular sport or cohort. The unit of observation is the individual college or university.

The dependent variable is the AGG as the measure of profit-athlete academic success. For each sport and cohort we examine the relationship for all profit-athletes, Black profit-athletes alone, and White profit-athletes alone. In each case, the graduation gaps are measured relative to the full-time male student body. Separate Black-White analyses were conducted to test our key hypothesis that, for various socioeconomic-demographic reasons described above, Black athletes are more vulnerable to subtle and/or overt pressures from athletic-department personnel to sacrifice academic success for athletic success and also more likely to become engulfed in their athletic role (Adler & Adler, 1991; Gurney & Southall, 2012; Hawkins, 2010; Eckard, 2010; Southall & Weiler, 2014).

Our primary independent variable was team performance as measured by the end-of-season *Sagarin* computer ratings (Sagarin, 2014a, 2014b). For each of the two athlete cohorts, we use the average Sagarin rating over the 6-year cohort period for each school. This computation "averages out" annual ups and downs creating a more stable measure of each school's commitment to top-level sport programs. The Sagarin ratings have an advantage over the Associated Press (AP) and other

standard football and basketball polls of being available for all Division I schools. In addition, unlike various coaches' and media polls, the Sagarin ratings are cardinal rather than ordinal. Because of the confounding effect of intraconference play, we do not use season victories or winning percentage. Schools within a conference have similar athletic ambitions, and there are significant differences among conferences in the strength of their members. Typically, roughly two-thirds of the regular season schedule consists of intraconference games. Thus, for example, a football school from a strong conference with (say) six wins could well be qualitatively "better" than another school with nine wins from a weak conference. The Sagarin computer algorithm includes a strength-of-schedule adjustment that in effect accounts for differences in conference strength.

Each analysis includes two other variables that might affect the relation under study. The first is a dummy variable (PRIV) equal to one for private schools and zero for public schools. The hypothesis we hope to test is that private schools generally have more resources and therefore are better able to support athletes in their academic endeavors. The second variable is a dummy (HBCU) equal to one for historically Black colleges and universities and zero otherwise. Cooper (2013) has posited that HBCUs provide a more supportive "cultural" environment for Black players, enabling better academic performance. We hope to examine Cooper's (2013) hypothesis, in light of Pierce's (2014) contention that decreased budgets for academic support for students, as well as athletes, at HBCUs could negatively affect adjusted graduation gaps at HBCUs. However, we are also aware HBCU athletes' (Black and White) AGGs might tend to be smaller based upon lower general-student-body graduation rates at these schools (Ferris, Finster, & McDonald, 2004; Southall, 2012; Southall, Nagel et al., 2013a; Southall, Nagel et al., 2013b; Southall et al., 2014). Consequently, our study will—in all likelihood—not provide definitive results related to this variable, but provide a context for additional research into the importance of cultural support and (more importantly) its impact on adjusted graduation gaps of HBCU football and men's basketball players.

Results

Table 1 shows summary statistics for the four developed sport/cohort combinations. The samples include all schools with reported graduation rates (FGRs) and Sagarin ratings for all six years of each cohort (i.e., classified as NCAA Division I for the entire period). For both sports the sample size (*N*) increases slightly from the 2004 cohort to the 2005 cohort, from 310 to 319 for basketball and from 209 to 211 for football.[5] Separate sample sizes are shown for Black and White AGGs because some schools had missing ethnic athlete FGRs.[6] Missing data were particularly prevalent in the White basketball sample, which is about 18% smaller than the all-athlete sample. Given the Sagarin rating methodology for each sport, the average ratings are lower for basketball than for football, approximately 60 versus 73. The value for PRIV shows the proportion of private schools in the samples. The basketball sample has significantly more, with roughly 32% private versus about 19% for football. HBCUs constitute about 7% of the basketball sample and 10% of the football sample. The mean all-profit-athlete graduation gap (ALL_AGG) was sizable for football at about 13 percentage points. It was substantially larger for basketball, at about 22 points. Similar differences existed between football and

basketball for the two ethnic AGGs. Last, Black AGGs were roughly 10 percentage points larger than White AGGs for both sports.

Table 2 reports regressions results with ALL_AGG as the dependent variable. The key independent variable RATING has the expected negative sign in all four equations. It was statistically significant (5% level) in both basketball equations and one football equation, a result largely consistent with our main hypothesis. The magnitude of the effect of RATING on ALL_AGG (the coefficients) was much larger for basketball. Turning to the secondary variables, HBCU has the expected positive sign and was statistically significant in both the football (1% level) and basketball (5% level) equations. The variable PRIV also had the expected positive sign, and was highly significant (1% level) in the basketball equations. Basketball players clearly do better academically in private schools. But in the football equations, the coefficients on PRIV were only marginally significant.

Table 1 Summary Statistics—Variable Means and Sample Sizes

	N	RATING	PRIV	HBCU	ALL_AGG	B_AGG	B_N	W_AGG	W_N
BB 2004	310	73.21	0.329	0.074	-20.9	-25.5	305	-15.4	255
BB 2005	319	72.87	0.320	0.072	-22.2	-26.3	316	-17.4	259
FB 2004	209	59.76	0.187	0.100	-12.9	-17.3	209	-6.3	205
FB 2005	211	59.94	0.194	0.100	-13.5	-17.8	211	-6.6	209

Table 2 Regressions With Dependent Variable = All-Athlete AGG Regression Coefficients (t-statistic)

	Football		Basketball	
Variable	2005 Cohort	2004 Cohort	2005 Cohort	2004 Cohort
RATING	-0.148**	-0.098	-0.362**	-0.376**
	(2.44)	(1.56)	(2.10)	(2.09)
PRIV	+3.31	+4.06*	+10.5***	+9.96***
	(1.54)	(1.81)	(4.10)	(3.86)
HBCU	+16.4***	+18.4***	+12.2**	+12.0**
	(5.07)	(5.59)	(2.37)	(2.33)
R-sq	0.230***	0.228***	0.094***	0.094***
N	211	209	319	310

*** 1% significance level

** 5% significance level

* 10% significance level

Tables 3 and 4 report regression results for Black and White profit-athletes, respectively. Recall that the hypothesis here was Black players are more vulnerable to pressures from athletic-department and athletic-academic support staff to sacrifice academic success for athletic success. This translates into an expectation that the coefficients on RATING in the Black equations will be greater in magnitude

Table 3 Regressions With Dependent Variable = Black AGG Regression Coefficients (t-statistic)

	Football		Basketball	
Variable	**2005 Cohort**	**2004 Cohort**	**2005 Cohort**	**2004 Cohort**
RATING	-0.267***	-0.217***	-0.514**	-0.656***
	(3.60)	(2.76)	(2.34)	(2.79)
PRIV	+5.07*	+4.27*	+11.2***	+7.28**
	(1.93)	(1.51)	(3.44)	(2.15)
HBCU	+18.9***	+20.5***	+15.1**	+13.1*
	(4.78)	(4.14)	(2.34)	(1.94)
R-sq	0.269***	0.240***	0.088***	0.078***
N	211	209	316	305

*** 1% significance level

** 5% significance level

* 10% significance level

Table 4 Regressions With Dependent Variable = White AGG Regression Coefficients (t-statistic)

	Football		Basketball	
Variable	**2005 Cohort**	**2004 Cohort**	**2005 Cohort**	**2004 Cohort**
RATING	+0.081	+0.036	+0.245	+0.175
	(0.90)	(0.42)	(0.85)	(0.58)
PRIV	-1.14	+2.23	+10.3**	+13.7***
	(0.36)	(0.73)	(2.36)	(3.17)
HBCU	+9.98**	+8.71*	+8.88	+5.54
	(2.01)	(1.80)	(0.57)	(0.32)
R-sq	0.021	0.019	0.023	0.039**
N	209	205	259	255

*** 1% significance level

** 5% significance level

* 10% significance level

than those in the White equations. In other words, as team ratings increase, Black AGGs will tend to increase more than White AGGs.

As can be seen in Table 3, the coefficients on the RATING variables were negative and statistically significant in all four equations, with a high significance level (1%) in three. Comparisons with the corresponding coefficients of Table 2 show Black coefficients were larger in magnitude by sizable amounts, which is consistent with our hypothesis that Black players are more vulnerable to pressures to sacrifice academic success. Looking at the secondary variables, HBCU had the expected sign and was highly significant (1% level) in the football equations. Interestingly, it had smaller coefficients and was less significant for basketball (marginally at the 5% level). Nevertheless the combined results suggest Black male athletes graduate at higher rates relative to the general full-time male student body at HBCUs. While these results are not definitive, they do offer support for Cooper's (2013) contention that an HBCU's cultural context may provide an environment conducive to HBCU players' academic success. The variable PRIV had the expected sign in all equations, but meets a 5% significance test only for basketball. This also offers evidence that Black men's basketball players graduate at higher rates at private schools. For football, the relation was only marginally significant.

The final regression results are reported in Table 4, where the dependent variable is White profit-athletes AGG (W_AGG). The expectation was that the coefficients on the RATING variables would be smaller in magnitude than in the Black player regressions of Table 3, but still negative. Surprisingly, the RATING coefficients all had *positive* signs, although none were statistically significant. This indicates that there was no relation between RATING and AGG for White players. It also means the results for the all-athlete AGGs (see Table 2) were driven solely by Black players. The results for PRIV indicated that, like Black basketball players, White basketball players do better in private schools. However, this effect does not appear to exist for football, where the signs were mixed and the coefficients insignificant. This was comparable to the results in Table 3, where the private school benefit for Black football players was also weaker.

The variable HBCU had the expected positive signs in all equations, but had statistical significance only for football. Thus there appears to be a graduation rate benefit only for White football players at HBCUs. A comparison of the White HBCU results with those of the Black HBCU (see Table 3) indicates the Black coefficients were larger in magnitude by a sizable amount and statistically much stronger, i.e., Black athletes have smaller AGGs. Thus, they benefit more academically than their White teammates from their association with HBCUs. While not conclusive, this result is consistent with the theory that HBCUs provide Black athletes with a more supportive cultural environment (Cooper, 2013).

Conclusions

Our main hypothesis was that pressure to win increases with expected team performance levels, and that Black profit-athletes are especially vulnerable to such pressures. Consequently, profit-athletes who play for the most successful FBS football and NCAA D-I men's basketball programs will graduate at lower rates than full-time male students, and this gap will be larger for Black athletes. Our results support this hypothesis. For Black athletes the expected negative RATING-AGG relation

was strong with high statistical significance. Averaging the two cohort coefficients for each sport, a 10-point Sagarin rating increase yielded increased Black AGGs of 2.4 percentage points in football and 5.8 points in basketball, more than twice that of football overall. For White athletes, the expectation was that the RATING-AGG relation would be weaker than for Blacks, albeit still negative. The results indicate that the relation is indeed weaker, supporting our hypothesis. But, surprisingly, we find no relation (no correlation) between White profit-athlete AGGs and team ratings in our samples, a result that will make an interesting subject for future research.

Our results, while not conclusive proof, are consistent with a cause-effect relationship between Black profit-athlete migration to athletically successful PWIs and increased negative AGGs, suggesting the need to question the current NCAA D-I Collegiate Model of Athletics. The strong negative RATING-AGG relation may be an expected consequence of PWIs focusing their recruiting efforts disproportionately on Black athletes from impoverished locales. In addition, these "hungry" players—motivated by professional sport aspirations (NCAA, 2010; Wieberg, 2011) and labor market choice (DeBrock et al., 1996)—may choose a PWI based much more on athletic rather than academic factors. These might include a program's on-field performance, conference affiliation, athletic facilities, and playing time opportunities (Dumond, Lynch, & Platania, 2008; Huffman & Cooper, 2012). Thus, lower profit-athlete graduation rates are not surprising. Such role engulfment (Adler & Adler, 1989, 1991) is consistent with Hawkins' (2010) oscillating migrant labor model, as well as Southall and Weiler's (2014) company-town metaphor.

While migrant profit-athletes may be engulfed in their athletic role, PWIs also fixate on profit-athletes' athletic prowess, admitting a disproportionate number through a "special talent" admissions process (Espenshade, Chung, & Walling, 2004; Farmer, 2012). While some faculty have expressed apprehension, PWI admissions data reveal relaxed special-admission standards, with profit-athletes from 27 identified universities being ten times more likely to be admitted via such methods (Scherzagier, 2009). Such special admissions policies are an expected response by PWIs to their desire to recruit profit-athletes from impoverished backgrounds with lower academic credentials (Comeaux & Harrison, 2007; Gurney and Southall, 2012, 2013; and Sellers, 1992). These policies may be more prevalent in schools with higher athletic aspirations, and therefore may be another contributor to the strong relation we find between Black graduation gaps and team ranking.

Paradoxically, enrollment figures indicate a high percentage of African American male students on PWI campuses are profit-athletes. This suggests that if not for these players' athleticism—from which PWIs generate revenue to support nonrevenue sports—PWIs would have little, if any, interest in establishing a relationship with profit-athletes (particularly Black profit-athletes), or Black males students in general—besides meeting desired or mandated enrollment quotas (Hawkins, 2010; Southall, Hawkins et al., 2012; Southall & Weiler, 2014). Consequently, our study offers support for the view that Black profit-athletes, who graduate at significantly lower rates than other full-time male students, are in many fundamental ways exploited oscillating migrant laborers (McCormick & McCormick, 2006; Southall & Weiler, 2014).

The NCAA national office, through sophisticated and subtle sociological propaganda (Jowett & O'Donnell, 1992; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013), offers a narrative in which the association's members have made tremendous progress in

addressing historic academic concerns. Proof of this improvement includes annual spending of $2.1 billion on athletic grants-in-aid, increased initial eligibility and mandatory progress toward degree requirements, as well as stringent Academic Progress Rates (APRs) and "record" GSR's (NCAA 2014a). For some, this narrative is comforting (i.e., coaches, conference commissioners, and administrators, and corporate partners), while others ignore the situation, existing in what Gramsci (1971) described as a state of "moral and political passivity" (p. 333). However, it is clear that many major college university presidents, athletic directors, and coaches view profit-athletes as valuable revenue-generating commodities.

As a result of their commodified status, profit-athletes (the majority of whom are Black males) exist in a highly segregated total-institution setting (Southall & Weiler, 2014). As a result, while big-time college football and men's basketball players may "walk among" other athletes and students on PWIs, they exist in a constrained institutional setting with invisible, but very real social boundaries. NCAA public service announcements critiquing "dumb jock" stereotypes and NCAA President Emmert extolling the virtues of the collegiate model (NCAA, 2014b), do not address how deeply opportunity and exploitation are entangled within big-time college sport.

The idyllic settings of many major universities, with colossal stadiums filled with adoring fans, offer visual confirmation for television viewers that "student-athletes" live in an ivy-covered, academic paradise. Carefully scripted game broadcasts often obscure the exploitative nature of the collegiate model, deflecting critiques of profit athletes as migrant company-town workers (Southall, Nagel, Amis & Southall, 2008; Southall, Southall & Dwyer, 2009). As Southall and Weiler (2014) chronicled, the lives of migratory profit-athletes are fundamentally different than those of most regular students.

Clearly, profit-athletes are a distinct class of individuals on a PWI (Schlabach, 2013). Many migrate from areas of the United States that are among the most-poverty ridden, with among the lowest educational attainment rankings (NCAA, 2010). Engulfed in their athletic role and motivated to succeed athletically to improve their family's economic status, it is not surprising profit-athletes (especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds) at more athletically successful universities graduate at significantly lower rates than other full-time male students. Profit-athletes recognize their ultimate utility to their "program" and university is revenue generation. They are well aware "revenue-sports" pay for the high-tech training facilities, ultra modern medical facilities, expansive state-of-the-art stadia, and multimillion dollar "academic-support" centers.

In spite of our results, we are well aware many fans, NCAA staff members, athletic department administrators, and associated stakeholders will continue to refer to profit-athletes as "student-athletes" and contend the opportunity to obtain a college education is adequate compensation—since a college education is "priceless" (Forde, 2011). While the "value of a college education" is undisputed, our research offers evidence profit-athletes—and more specifically Black profit-athletes—do not have access to the same educational opportunities as other college students. If this is the case, their opportunities may not result in the many economic and social benefits typically derived from obtaining a postsecondary education (Harper & Harris, 2012). Our results, reinforced by other research documenting graduation-rate disparities (Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013), call into question the degree to

which the current NCAA D-I collegiate model ensures and improves profit-athletes' well being, provides an appropriate level of academic rigor, and enables "…them to be educated, to graduate and to be successful in their chosen careers" (NCAA, 2014a, p. 5). Future research should continue to reexamine the extent to which migrant profit-athletes truly have equal access to an education—the quid pro quo of the Collegiate Model of Athletics.

Notes

1. United States universities with predominately White student populations that are NCAA Division-I members competing in NCAA FBS football and/or NCAA D-I men's basketball.

2. Profit-athletes are NCAA college athletes whose estimated market value exceeds the value of NCAA-approved compensation (i.e., NCAA Bylaw 15.02.5 "A full grant-in-aid is financial aid that consists of tuition and fees, room and board, and required course-related books."). That difference is a measure of the degree to which they are economically exploited. For example, Brown (2011) estimates that a premium college football player generates over $1 million in revenues for his school.

3. The NCAA also calculates an athlete-only graduation rate, the Graduation Success Rate (GSR), which is essentially the athlete FGR adjusted for transfers. Since the GSR utilizes different sampling and methodological techniques from the FGR, it is not comparable to the general student body FGR and therefore is excluded from the current study. More information regarding the GSR can be found at http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/graduation-rates

4. Maintaining "academic eligibility" is a low hurdle, usually a minimum 2.0 GPA or "C" average. Students, including athletes, who meet this standard, are better described as "marginal" rather than "successful."

5. The Sagarin ratings include all schools from both the Football Bowl Sub-Division and the Football Championship Sub-Division.

6. To avoid revealing information for individual athletes, the NCAA does not report graduation data for ethnic groups with fewer than three athletes.

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