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Clashing Models of Commercial Sport in Higher Education: Implications for Reform and Scholarly Research

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Big-time college sport has successfully weathered one wave of reform after another for over 100 years. Yet, passionate debates continue regarding the educational impact of highly commercialized sport in American universities. The major purpose of this study is to identify the issues and assumptions that divide reformers and reform groups. It also makes explicit the conceptual models—intellectual elitist, academic capitalist, and athletes rights—they use to interpret the reality of commercialized college sport. This study does not test the validity of each model. Rather it explores logical connections between these models and reform policies likely to be pursued by those who embrace them. These conceptual models can also serve as building blocks for theory and future scholarly research.

No sooner had collegiate sport emerged as a popular form of commercial entertainment in the latter nineteenth century, than it spawned movements for reform. A number of scholars (e.g., Benford, 2007; Craughron, 2001; Gerdy, 2006a; Smith, 2009) have chronicled the scores of reform initiatives and movements that have been launched since that time. A close look at the literature reveals that early reformers viewed commercialism (making money from college sport) and professionalism (paying players to compete) as a threat to academic values and integrity (e.g. Savage, 1929). College sport has weathered one wave of reform after another for over 100 years. Yet, debates continue to rage regarding the educational impact of commercial college sport which has become a multi-billion dollar industry. Although reformers of all stripes are passionate about maintaining sports as an integral part of academic life, they are often worlds apart, as this study will make clear, when it comes to explaining what is wrong with the current system and how to fix it.

The major purpose of this study is to identify the issues and assumptions that divide reformers and reform groups, and to make explicit the conceptual models they use to interpret the reality of commercialized college sport. This study does not attempt to test the validity of each of these models. Rather it explores logical connections between these models and the types of reform policies those who embrace them are likely to pursue. Because all models present

reality from a particular perspective, they are limited and tentative (DaCosta & French, 2003; Morgan & Morrison, 1999; Theodorson & Theodorsen, 1969). Nonetheless, they can serve as building blocks for theory and empirical research. Thus, the models proposed in this study will not only attempt to describe the ideas and ideologies that guide various reform movements, but encourage scholarly research on commercial sport in higher education.

Scholars have proposed a variety of names for the models that describe college sport in American universities. Smith (1985) distinguishes between amateur and professional models. The former, which had its origins among the nineteenth century British aristocracy, eschews athletic scholarships and mass spectacles for commercial gain. The latter which is a unique creation of American universities, embraces commercialism as well as the recruitment and subsidization of highly skilled athletes (Smith, 1985). Other labels for college sport found in the literature juxtapose academic, educational, or participatory models with commercial, corporate, or spectator models (Cottingham & Hart-Nibbrig, 1986; Thelin & Wiseman, 1989; Watterson, 2000; Woo, 1999). Regardless of the label, those who propose these dichotomous models tend to assume that commercialism and professionalism are incompatible with traditional academic values.

The conceptual models proposed in this study—intellectual elitist, academic capitalist, and athletes' rights—differ from earlier models in a number of ways. First, they represent three contrasting views of the role of commercial college sport in higher education. The focus is not on non-revenue sports or programs such as those in the NCAA's Division III or the Ivy League. The three models in this study also differ from earlier formulations in that they attempt to grasp the reality of big-time college sport from the perspective of those trying to reform it, some of whom reject the long standing assumption that commercialism inevitably undermines academic values. The three models developed in this study also go beyond earlier formulations by emphasizing the increasing role that stakeholders such as college athletes themselves are beginning to play in reform movements in the new millennium.

This study relies in part on observations gained from discussions and debates the author has had with scores of people committed to college sport reform. Recorded interviews were carried out with leaders in college sport reform such as NCAA President Myles Brand, National College Player's Association Director Ramogi Huma, former Co-Chair of the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Sports Theodore Hesburgh, and Drake Group founder Jon Ericson. Valuable information was also gleaned from the organizational websites, formal documents, books, and articles published by members and supporters of reform movements such the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) and Rutgers 1000. It was from these sources that conceptual frameworks (or models) of how reform groups perceive commercial sport in education began to emerge.

By far the biggest differences found among those who support various reform groups were assumptions they make regarding the following issues:

- the relationship of commercialism to academic values,
- the educational impact and legal status of athletic scholarships,
- the mission of higher education.

Depending on positions taken on these issues, reformers and reform groups were classified as intellectual elitists, academic capitalists, and athletes' rights advocates.¹ Examples of reformers and proponents of reform who embrace these models are provided throughout this study

Conceptual Models of Commercial College Sport

Intellectual Elitism

Reformers who fit the intellectual elitist model (e.g., Dowling, 2001, 2007; Ericson & Svare, 2006; Gerdy, 2006a; Splitt, 2007; Svare, 2004), argue that highly commercialized athletics has a negative effect on American higher education. When universities sell their athletic programs to television networks or to corporate sponsors, they argue, television ratings trump academic values. To win games and keep the revenue flowing, universities recruit athletes with embarrassingly low academic credentials, and keep them eligible by turning a blind eye to cheating or by steering them into courses with little academic substance. Intellectual elitists wonder how athletes who are "special admits" can maintain athletic eligibility, while giving most of their waking hours to sports. Intellectual elitists are also concerned with what they perceive to be extravagant expenditures on sports that may drain resources away from classrooms, libraries and laboratories.

Intellectual elitists are unrelenting in their criticism of athletic commercialism. They also target subsidization of athletes in the form of athletic scholarships. Advocates of this position (e.g., Gerdy, 2006b; Porto, 2003) generally have two major concerns about athletic scholarships. First they worry that awarding financial aid on the basis of athletic performance invariably attracts students whose top priority is sports rather than traditional academic values. Second, they argue that giving coaches control of financial aid, allows coaches rather than college professors to set academic priorities for college athletes. The mission of higher education, as intellectual elitists see it, is not to create athletes, but well-educated citizens whose education is enhanced by competitive sports. For some intellectual elitists, (e.g., Dowling, 2007) the ideal university would be a community of scholars and students insulated from the rampant commercialism that, in their opinion, is swamping many universities.

Academic Capitalism

An increasing number of scholars (Bok, 2003; Kirp, 2003; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) have been focusing on "academic capitalism," an approach to university governance that emphasizes the importance of "the bottom line." This increasing emphasis on business concerns may help to explain the increasing acceptance by college presidents and others of a model of big-time college sport that uses the same marketing practices and revenue streams as professional leagues such as the National Basketball Association and the National Football League. In an era when academic departments are often viewed as revenue centers, students as customers, and the priorities of higher education are determined less by the institution than by donors, corporations, and politicians, the current emphasis on aggressively marketing college sport seems more

consistent with general university policy than it might have in the past (Brand, 2006c; King & Slaughter, 2004).

Over the past couple of years, Myles Brand, the president of the NCAA, has emerged as an articulate spokesperson for the academic capitalist model of college sport. Brand's views on commercialism in college sport sharply contrast with those of intellectual elitists. According to Brand, college sport depends on commercialism as much as higher education does (Brand, 2006b). From his perspective, commercialism is a good thing as long as commercial activities are perfectly in tune with the values, mission, and goals of higher education. Sports revenue often provides young men and women in non-revenue sports with a chance to participate. But the inherently educational nature of sport participation makes big-time college sport consistent with a university's academic mission, not its ability to generate revenue (Brand, 2006c).

According to the academic capitalist model, athletic scholarships are awards that help college athletes further their education. Far from detracting from the education of college athletes, these scholarships have had a democratizing effect on higher education, adding to campus diversity, and opportunities for minorities and women. Athletic scholarships are much like other merit awards in this regard (Brand, 2006d). Although athletes, like other students with special talents, are sometimes given an edge in the college admissions process, freshman eligibility standards, the provision of academic support services, and close scrutiny of athletes' academic progress can ensure that athletes receive the same educational opportunities as other students. In fact, according to Brand (2006d), Division I athletes graduate at higher rates than other students.

A central assumption of the academic capitalist model is that big-time college athletes are amateurs engaging in sports as an avocation. Amateurism, according to Myles Brand, "defines the participants, not the enterprise," meaning that the amount of revenue generated by college sports, even if this revenue comes from the same sources as those used by professional leagues and franchises, is totally irrelevant when it comes to differentiating amateur and professional sports (Brand, 2006a). The difference lies with whether the athletic participants are paid, and from the perspective of academic capitalism for which Brand is a key spokesperson, athletic scholarships do not constitute "pay for play."

The mission of higher education, as many academic capitalists see it, should emphasize career preparation as much as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Consistent with this mission, they view extracurricular activities as equal in importance to what is taught in the classroom or laboratory. In sports, for instance, students receive "real life" lessons in leadership, hard work, self-discipline, teamwork, self-sacrifice, and striving for excellence (Brand, 2006d). Hofstadter (1963), in his classic book, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, distinguished between "intellect" and "intelligence." Intelligence, the quality of mind that Hofstadter associates with practical problem solving and ideas that lead to clearly defined goals, tends to be a better fit for academic capitalism than does intellect, which Hofstadter associates with critical thinking and the life of the mind.²

Athletes' Rights

Athlete's rights advocates assume that collegiate sport as commercial entertainment is deeply embedded in the fabric of American life and will remain so. They also view athletic scholarships as contracts for hire, not educational gifts. What they perceive as the "myth of amateurism" supposedly denies these athletes rights and protections that other employees take for granted, such as workers' compensation insurance, and a fair share of the revenue they generate (Byers, 1995; Hawkins, 2000; Meggyesy, 2000; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Sack, 2008; Telander, 1989; Ukeiley, 1996). Some advocates for athletes' rights, not unlike intellectual elitists, think athletic scholarships undermine academic integrity (Sack, 2008). When coaches control financial aid, it is they, not college professors that set academic priorities for college athletes

The NCAA, according to proponents of athletes' rights, supports free enterprise for everyone but the athletes. Celebrity coaches, they argue, endorse products and engage in a variety of entrepreneurial activities to supplement their salaries. Why, they ask, should the athletes not be allowed to benefit financially from the academic capitalism so common in the rest of the university? Myles Brand's statement about "amateurism defining the participants, not the enterprise" sounds to athletes' rights advocates like a formula for exploitation (Huma, 2006; Sack, 2008). With regard to the mission of higher education, the athlete's rights advocates argue that scholarship athletes are students and workers. As students they deserve the same educational opportunities as other students; as workers, they deserve the same rights as other employees (McCormick & McCormick, 2006).

Fixing College Sport

Intellectual Elitist Reforms

For those who support the intellectual elitist model of college sports reform, the alleged corporate takeover of college sports represents an assault on academic integrity and academic standards. Rutgers 1000, founded by Rutgers professor William Dowling, is an excellent example of a reform group that embraces the intellectual elitist model. Rutgers 1000 came into existence as a reaction to Rutgers University's decision to move its athletic programs into the Big East conference. One of the first reform initiatives taken by Rutgers 1000 was to circulate a petition asking the board of governors to (a) resign from the Big East (b) abolish athletic scholarships, and (c) to join a non-athletic scholarship league or conference. Other protest actions followed. The strategy taken by the faculty, students, and others in Rutgers 1000 is to fight what they perceive to be an assault on academic values by abandoning big-time college sport altogether (Dowling, 2007).

The Drake Group, an organization of faculty and others whose mission is to "defend academic integrity in the face of the burgeoning college sport industry" is arguably the best example of a national organization whose reform agenda is shaped by the intellectual elitist model. The Drake Group which was founded in 2000, opposes commercialism in college sport, but understands that big-time college sport as commercial entertainment has become deeply

embedded American culture. Thus, its reforms are more an attempt to lessen the negative impact of commercialism, than to eliminate it altogether. The mission, objectives, history, and specific suggestions for reform can be found on the group's website (TheDrakegroup.org).

Among the reforms that are consistent with the intellectual elitist model are the following: replacing one-year-renewable athletic scholarships with need-based aid, or athletic scholarships whose renewal is not dependent on athletic performance; requiring athletes to fit the same academic profile as other students; restoring freshman ineligibility, especially for "special admits;" ensuring that athletes can pursue the major of their choice, and that athletic contests do not conflict with class attendance; making the location and control of academic support services for athletes the same as for all students; requiring that athletes maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0 each semester to be eligible for sports; fully disclosing aggregate data on the majors, advisors, GPA, courses taken, and names of instructors for all athletes; and closely monitoring the growth rate of operating expenditures in sports.

Disclosure is critical to the Drake Group's reform strategy. Drake members assume that if the academic corruption that allegedly keeps big-time college sports in operation were publicly disclosed, there might be a national scandal. The first step toward disclosure would be to establish that misuse of the Family Educational and Privacy Act (FERPA) hides faculty and administrative malfeasance. The goal of disclosure is not to embarrass athletes, but to shed light on whether universities are actually providing athletes with a meaningful education (Salzwedel & Ericson (2003). The Drake Group has supported Congressional hearings on the college sport industry's tax exemption, in hope that even the threat of such a hearing and the disclosure that would result could get the NCAA to consider modest educational reforms. (Splitt, 2007).

The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA), an alliance of football Bowl Championship Subdivision faculty senates, supports many of the same reform proposals as the Drake group, but the groups differ considerably regarding the political leverage it would take to get any one of these proposals implemented. While the Drake group views significant change as unlikely without government intervention, COIA attempts to work with faculty senates, conferences, and the NCAA to enable its proposals to be adopted as national policies. COIA has produced a number of significant policy papers and co-sponsored a major conference with the Knight Foundation. Its 28 proposals which cover four major areas of concern: academic integrity and quality, student-athlete welfare, campus governance, and fiscal responsibility can be found online (COIA, 2007).

Academic Capitalist Reforms

Given the assumptions underlying the academic capitalist model, it is not surprising that its supporters are committed to growing the business of collegiate sports. According to Myles Brand (2006a), "Athletics, like the university as a whole, seeks to maximize revenues. In this respect, it has an obligation to conduct its revenue-generating activities in a productive and sound business-like manner. Anything less would be incompetence at best and malfeasance at worst" (p.8). It seems fair to say that a major reform measure being taken by the NCAA is to restructure its business practices to maximize profit. Commercial activity, ranging from the sale of broadcast rights to logo licensing is, according to Brand (2006a.), mandated by the business

plan, provided that it is done in a way that fully respects the underlying principles of the university.

In recent years, the NCAA has changed its rules to ensure that athletes who do poorly on standardized tests—minorities are more likely to fall in this category than others—have an opportunity to receive athletic scholarships and participate in sports as freshmen. It accomplished this by replacing its initial eligibility rule that previously required a minimum combined SAT score of 820 (or an equivalent ACT score) with a sliding scale that allows a high GPA to offset a low test score. The NCAA has also increased the number of core academic courses athletes must take in high school (NCAA, 2009). By so doing, it has made it more difficult for athletes to attain a high GPA than was the case in the past, thus strengthening admissions standards.

Although the NCAA has lowered its initial eligibility standardized test bar somewhat to provide admissions opportunities for a more academically diverse group of athletes, it has also passed legislation to raise the likelihood that these athletes will graduate. Several years ago, the NCAA, following recommendations put forth by the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, introduced its Academic Performance Rating (APR) that tracks, on a semester by semester basis, every Division I athlete's progress toward a degree. Athletes receive points for staying in school as well as for maintaining eligibility (NCAA, 2009). Teams whose APR scores drop below a certain level are punished by the loss athletic scholarships. If teams continue to fall below acceptable APR minimums, they may become ineligible for post-season tournament competition. In 2009, Centenary's men's basketball team and Tennessee-Chattanooga's football squad became the first programs to be banned from postseason play because of low APR scores (Associated Press, 2009).

The combination of somewhat lower initial eligibility requirements with greater pressure to ensure that athletes make progress toward a degree has led to a substantial increase in academic services for athletes. According to a *Chronicle of Higher Education* survey (Wolverton, 2008) over half of the nation's 73 biggest athletic programs have more than doubled their spending in academic support for athletes during the past ten years. On the average, institutions spent more than a \$1 million dollars in academic support in 2007-08. The increased emphasis on providing academic support for athletes through state-of-the-art counseling centers is consistent with the academic capitalist belief that such efforts can maintain big-time college athletes as an integral part of the student body.

Athletes Rights Reforms

The athletes' rights model of college sports rests on the assumption that athletic scholarships are employment contracts and that big-time college sport is a business. The goal of most athletes' rights advocates is to provide what they consider to be fair compensation for the athletes who labor in the multibillion dollar college sport industry. Their tactics have included legislative initiatives in state government to secure worker's compensation rights for college athletes, organizing college athletes and forming alliances with organized labor, challenging the NCAA on antitrust grounds to raise the athletic scholarship cap, and filing law suits against the NCAA to allow athletes to accept sponsorship money to prepare for the Olympics (Sack, 2008).

The athletes' rights model takes commercialism as a given, but demands that athletes be able to share in the revenue.

For several years, an effort to organize college athletes to defend their rights has been underway in California. Under the leadership of former UCLA linebacker Ramogi Huma, an organization now called the National College Player's Association (NCPA) has been pursuing better medical benefits for athletes and financial compensation to cover the full cost of a college education. Even though the NCPA is politically moderate, its alliance with the United Steel Workers of America, avoidance of fiery rhetoric, and disciplined focus on issues that have a strong appeal to the college athletes have made the NCPA an organization to which the NCAA has had to respond. According to Huma, "The players are already paid. They are just not paid a lot. It's like you see in any other job. If you stop going to work you don't get paid. You can call it amateurism if you want, but it is what it is" (Huma, 2006).

The NCPA helped to launch an antitrust lawsuit filed in Los Angeles in 2006 that sought to prohibit the NCAA from telling its members they can not offer athletic scholarships up to the full cost of attendance. This class action was brought on behalf of current Division I football and major college basketball players, as well as any player in the past four years. The NCAA reached an agreement with the plaintiffs that received preliminary approval by a U.S. District Court. One of the settlement terms requires a change in how \$218 million in existing Special Assistance and Academic enhancement Funds are distributed. Other settlement terms included the creation of a \$10 million fund to reimburse former college athletes for educational expenses, new rules on health insurance for college athletes, and a commitment by the NCAA to examine the possibility of awarding multi-year scholarships (Hosick, 2008).

Sonny Vaccaro, a former executive in the licensed sports products industry turned athletes' right advocate, is waging a one-man crusade to challenge the rule that requires high school basketball players to wait one year before entering the NBA draft (Streeter, 2009). One of his strategies has been to create a pipeline that would send top high school players to Europe to play until they decide whether they want to consider the NBA. Vaccaro has also challenged the NCAA and its member institutions' right to market the likenesses of current and former college athletes without their permission. Vaccaro argues that athletes deserve financial compensation for the use of such likenesses. Vaccaro's goal is to go to Congress to make his case. Strategies such as these are the logical outgrowth of athlete's rights assumptions.

Implications for Research

The term ideology is often used in social science to describe ideas that defend group interests or justify a given political agenda. (Eagleton, 1991; Mannheim, 1936; Van Dijk, 1998). The elements of an ideology tend to be accepted as truth or dogma rather than as tentative theoretical formulations. The intellectual elitist, academic capitalist, and athletes' rights models discussed in this study in some ways fit the definition of ideologies. However, each conceptual model raises provocative questions that are amenable to empirical research. The fact that these models are grounded in ideology will undoubtedly influence the topics chosen, the questions asked, the language used to frame the questions, and the topics most likely to be funded.

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Nonetheless the truth value of the findings themselves must withstand the close scrutiny of logic and scientific method.

Intellectual Elitist Research Agenda

A central assumption of the intellectual elitist model is that commercialism in collegiate sport undermines academic values, leads to practices that undermine academic integrity, and makes it difficult for athletes to reconcile their roles as athletes and students. Studies of student-athlete role conflict have been carried out over the years (e.g., Sack & Thiel, 1985; Adler & Adler, 1991). But no major study has been undertaken recently to compare the athletic and educational experiences of big-time college athletes with athletes in comparable sports at the NCAA Division III level. Such studies would shed considerable light on whether the intellectual elitist case against commercialism and scholarships is a valid one.

Another line of research that would examine intellectual elitist assumptions relates to whether athletes in major revenue sports are really being educated or merely being kept eligible. Knapp & Raney (1990) and more recently, Fountain & Finley (2009) pursued a line of research on what they called “clustering” which was defined as the tendency of athletes to be over-represented in academic majors that give higher grades for less work. In addition to clustering, Knapp and Raney found athletes were more likely than other students to take incompletes in courses not finished during a regular semester, to have grades changed by professors, and to take summer courses when professors tend to be less demanding. The question of whether athletes are more likely than other students to take gut courses with friendly faculty and to engage in other academic shortcuts is one that should be addressed empirically.

Investigative reporters have been increasingly successful in gaining access to data that sheds light on these issues. *USA Today* recently released figures that suggested considerable clustering among Division I athletes (Leiber-Steeg, 2008). In addition to information on clustering, journalists have recently reported data on the large number of special admits in big-time sports schools (Alesia, 2008), the significant gap between big-time college football players and other students in standardized test scores (Knobler, 2008), and the boom in the construction of academic service facilities in universities with major sport program (Wolverton, 2008). Although these studies contributed to knowledge of how college athletes are educated, they fell short of the rigor needed to qualify as scientific studies. Nonetheless, these studies suggest provocative hypotheses for those interested in research in this area.

Shulman & Bowen (2000), and Bowen & Levin (2003), relying heavily on data from the College and Beyond Data Base, produced two of the most rigorous data-based studies of college sports ever undertaken. By studying 90,000 students at 30 elite public and private colleges and universities who entered those institutions in 1951, 1976, and 1989, Shulman and Bowen found that the gap between athletes and other students in academic ability and performance has grown substantially over the past three decades. Athletes performed more poorly than other students on just about every measure. Bowen and Levin, working with the same data set, found similar gaps between students and athletes at non-scholarship granting institutions. The focus on academically elite public and private institutions makes it difficult to generalize these findings to other schools. But these studies set a high standard for future research in this area.

Academic Capitalist Research Agenda

In addition to research on the academic progress of athletes, evaluation research on the progress of NCAA academic reforms, and data on rules infractions and how they are handled, the academic capitalist model of college athletic reform raises research questions about marketing, promotion, and brand management. For instance, at what point does college sport become so commercialized that it can no longer differentiate itself from the pros, thereby sacrificing what makes it unique? Market research to determine college fan sensibilities to signage, commercial timeouts, sales promotions, and the other trappings of advertising so common at events such as NASCAR would fit well in the academic capitalist research agenda. For instance, would the American public tolerate the placement of corporate logos all over a player's uniform, a common practice with NASCAR drivers. According to Brand (2005), "tolerance for advertising is an acquired taste. Extensive signage and loud in venue ads may be acceptable for professional sporting events that are not accepted by fans...in the collegiate venue" (p. 22).

Research on the impact of sports on the brand equity of a university also fits this model (e.g., Boyle & Magnusson, 2007; Bruening & Lee, 2007; Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008). For instance, does a controversy regarding criminal behavior by a college athlete or serious rule violations by an athletic program detract from a school's overall public image? Conversely, does a winning team or a university's decision to move from a lower NCAA Division to a higher one enhance the value of the school's academic brand in the eyes of significant stakeholders? Such research makes a valuable contribution to the literature on the complex relationship between sport and American universities. The economics of collegiate sport, including the financing of new facilities, relations with broadcast media, the economic impact of conference realignment, the financial impact of Title IX, and many other aspects of running the college sport business are fertile ground for scholarly research.

The issue of Title IX and gender equity provides an insight into how an intellectual elitist and academic capitalist research agenda might differ. While the intellectual elitist model would support research to examine the possible negative academic impact of highly commercialized college sport on both men and women, the academic capitalist model would support market research on how to get more fans in the seats, more television exposure, more licensing agreements, and more corporate sponsorship for women's collegiate sports events. Both are legitimate lines of research, but reflect different values about the role of sport in higher education.

Athletes Rights Research Agenda

Almost no research has been completed to assess college athletes' opinions regarding their financial, legal, and academic rights. In 1987, the president's commission of the NCAA commissioned a multimillion-dollar study of college athletes (AIR, 1988). Although the survey instrument contained a wide variety of questions concerning education and the daily life of college athletes, not a single question was included on compensation issues such as whether scholarships adequately covered living expenses or whether athletes were satisfied with their

medical insurance coverage. The compensation issue was not addressed, even though accepting benefits in excess of what NCAA rules allow had been the primary reason for placing schools on NCAA probation. Of the 49 universities on probation in 1988 and 1989 the cause for action in 34 cases was improper benefits to athletes.³

An early study of these kinds of issues was a survey of 1,182 current and former NFL Football Players carried out in 1990 (Sack, 1991). Among the more interesting findings was that over a third of the players admitted taking under-the-table payments while still in college. In the Southeast Conference, the percentage was 67 percent. Overall, 78 percent of the players agreed that college athletes deserve greater compensation than NCAA rules allow. This survey was carried out before the millions of dollars began flowing in from the Bowl Championship Series, the NCAA's \$6 billion dollar deal with CBS for its basketball championship tournament, and other sources (Zimbalist, 1999).

A similar survey carried out today might be a major contribution to the research literature on college sport in the Twenty-First Century. No one really knows what the athletes are thinking. Do they support the National College Player's Association's effort to increase scholarships to the full-cost of a college education? What are their views concerning health benefits and issues such as workers compensation? How would attitudes toward these issues break down by race, class, and gender? Are issues such as these only a concern for athletes in revenue producing sports? The answer to questions like these could help uncover a side of collegiate sport that would likely go unnoticed if the agenda for research were set by academic capitalist or academic elitist assumptions. Other research questions raised by the athlete's rights model include antitrust issues, and a wide variety of other legal issues likely to emerge if athletes begin to demand the same rights as others who make money from college sport.

To date, the issue of athlete's rights has received the greatest attention from scholars and attorneys writing for various sport law journals. Among the topics examined are whether athletic scholarships constitute employment contracts (McCormick & McCormick, 2006), the issue of compensation for college athletes (Sobocinski, 1996), the NCAA's version of amateurism (Muenzen, 2003), the NCAA's rules and antitrust (Mitten, 2000), and the negative impact of corporate college sport on gender equity (Staurowsky, 2003). Speaking of federal judges dealings with college sport, Nagy (2000,) says that when "confronted with the clash between soothing nostalgia and distressing reality, these judges, all of them white men who attended college before 1960, simply refused to view college athletes, even the participants in big-time college football, as suppliers of labor in an economic market" (p. 368). Educating young attorneys seems like an obvious strategy for athletes' rights advocates.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study has attempted to identify the issues and assumptions that often divide reformers and reform groups, and to make explicit the conceptual models that shape their perspectives of commercialized college sport. The aim of people who passionately embrace these models is not only to present the facts about how the system operates, but to use words and ideas to win others over to their side. Myles Brand has railed against what he calls "self-anointed radical reformers and incorrigible cynics" who do not get their facts straight (Brand,

2004). Critics of the current system (e.g., Byers, 1995; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998) accuse the NCAA and its member institutions of using the “myth of amateurism” as ideological camouflage to bend the facts to fit their economic interests. In big-time college sport, where the stakes are high, ideas often become weapons in a struggle for power.

Max Weber, in his essays on politics and teaching as vocations (Gerth & Mills, 1948), argued that politics and science should be kept totally separate, keeping the latter value free. More contemporary philosophers and sociologists of science (e.g., Bloor, 1982; Collins & Cox, 1976; Feyerabend, 1987; Latour & Woolgar, 1979) reject the distinctive epistemological status of science, arguing that all knowledge, including that derived from scientific method, is socially constructed. A compromise position, the one adopted here, is that the “non-cognitive” aspects of science, such as the topics chosen, the questions asked, and the kinds of research most likely to be funded, are often influenced by political and social factors. But the truth value of the findings themselves (the cognitive content) must withstand the close scrutiny of logic and science (Chalmers, 1990).

The distinction between the cognitive and non-cognitive content of science has relevance for college sport research. Knowing a researcher’s religious and political background, for instance, may help to explain the choice of a research topic and where he or she will find funding. This is a valid topic for the sociology of science, and may help to explain why some topics receive more attention than others. However, just because someone is an ardent Christian, for instance, should not invalidate his or her research on the role of religion in collegiate sport. One has to look at the validity of the results (cognitive content). Science requires a close look at logic and facts. When passions run high, as they often do in discussions of college sport reform, it is easy to substitute ad hominem attacks for careful examination of the scientific validity of the facts.

Until fairly recently, there has been no independent research center that could bring scholars with disparate interests and political perspectives together to critically examine their own and others’ taken-for-granted assumptions. The NCAA has undertaken and funded a prodigious amount of applied research, much of which has guided its policy decisions. However, the NCAA’s research agenda, as has been argued throughout this article, is likely to be shaped by its academic capitalist assumptions. And members of other reform groups have been equally likely to limit their vision to facts that support their pet ideologies. What is needed is a forum where scholars and others with diverse perspectives can join together to engage in critical dialogue and high quality cooperative research. The lack of such a forum is striking considering the financial, educational, and symbolic role played by sport in American universities.

A very positive development which could broaden the knowledge base that has informed policy in the area of college sport is the founding of the College Sport Research Institute (CSRI) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Institute’s stated mission is to encourage and support interdisciplinary and interuniversity collaborative college-sport research, serve as a research consortium for college-sport researchers from across the United States, and disseminate college-sport research results to academics, college-sport practitioners, and the general public (CSRI, 2009). The Institute serves as a national clearing house for college sports research, publishes a peer-reviewed journal, and hosts a national academic conference where scholars from diverse disciplines can present research on issues in college sport, and debate the role of

sport in higher education. Participants in CSRI range across the sports reform political spectrum. Institutes such as CSRI cannot eliminate politics from college sport dialogue. They can, however, force reform groups to face facts that do not fit their preconceived notions.

Universities in the United States have rarely faced the kinds of challenges they do at the end of the first decade of the new millennium. A world-wide recession will undoubtedly strain university budgets, and even before this recession, graduates of universities in the United States have been falling behind graduates in other nations in their skills in math, science, and even literacy (Gerdy, 2006a; Palaima & Tublitz, 2009). In this environment, college sport, especially in its highly commercialized form, will come under increasing scrutiny to insure that it is meeting its stated purpose of maintaining athletes as an integral part to the student body. A number of reform models will be proposed and debated. Independent research which approaches college sport from a variety of perspectives can help to chart the course of college sport and education into the future, and insure that no one interest group will be able to control the research agenda.

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Footnotes

¹The label intellectual elitist was chosen because it best describes those who place priority on the "life of the mind," and who think that just as there are "elite athletes," a widely used term, there are elites in intellectual ability. The label academic capitalist derives from current literature on academic capitalism (e.g., Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The label, athletes' rights, is self-explanatory, and is described in greater detail in the text.

²Brand (2006c) stated in an interview that Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American life* is a "great book." He argues, however, that the emphasis placed by Hofstadter on intellect over intelligence in higher education never fit the missions of most of America's major state universities. The land grant colleges, he argues, were expected to engage in activities that went beyond the cultivation of the life of the mind in order to meet the needs of external constituencies, but were able to support an active intellectual life as well.

³The source of information on institutions under NCAA sanctions were: *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 34 (24), A46, February 24, 1988 and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 35 (17), January 4, 1989.