

## Integration and Communication: Communicating Proportion

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After many years as a professor and academic administrator at an NCAA Division I research mega-university (and perennial football powerhouse), I took an appointment as Provost at Division III Southwestern, the historic liberal arts college in Georgetown, Texas. My first Southwestern athletic event was a men's soccer match. A Southwestern outside forward took a pass from the right midfielder, drove to the net, rifled a shot and scored. The faculty colleague standing next to me did a little leap into the air, shouted with excitement, and elbowed me lightly in the ribs, exclaiming, "Man, did that kid turn in a great paper last week!" Thus began my reintroduction to Division III, where I'd had a little experience many years before. The faculty member who had given me the quick jab was clearly excited about the goal but, as significant, he was *communicating* something about athletics and a liberal arts education. He appreciated the strong right-footed shot, but he was indicating the primacy of academics in his perception of and relationship with the student who had launched it.

This incident offered me an effective reminder of President A. Bartlett Giamatti's talk to the leadership of the Association of Yale Alumni in 1980 on varsity athletics at Yale and on the future of the Ivy League, which I remember well from its reportage in my alumni magazine. Giamatti's off-quoted remarks stressed the importance of "proportion" in understanding the place of varsity athletics in an undergraduate education. It was not enough for Giamatti that classroom education and out of the classroom experiences on the playing field or ball court or in the pool could reasonably coexist. Rather, there must be proportionality exercised by both student athlete and institution in the time, effort, attention, and resources directed to athletics relative to academics and intellectual pursuits. In computing this fraction, the denominator, Giamatti made clear, must always be academic element. As the Yale president put it, "Athletics is essential but not primary. It contributes to the point but is not the point itself."

I'm certain that it is a respect for proportionality (combined with occasional puzzlement about how to best achieve it) that brings us here today at the College Sports Project Integration Institute and joins us with a larger number of colleges and universities that have agreed to participate in the CSP. We are convinced, or we wouldn't be here at all, that there *is* a numerator to the proportion that represents the right relationship between intercollegiate athletics and our academic missions. That is, we acknowledge—and even celebrate—that athletics can be, for many students, a valuable part of the undergraduate experience in learning and growing. The list of contributions attributable to participation in competitive athletics is an old one:

That there is educational value in physical and mental challenge.

That self-discipline can be learned in preparation for competition.

That there is appreciation for teamwork, opportunity for leadership, and the rewards of the camaraderie of the team.

That there are learning opportunities related to sportsmanship and fair play that are transferable to other areas of collegiate and post-collegiate life.

Even a pretty mediocre college athlete like me (soccer), who did not even stick out participation for all four undergraduate years, is prepared to acknowledge some valuable personal growth opportunities that grew out of the athletic experience. Certainly, each of the items on this list seems relevant to some of the outcomes we seek from a liberal education. And they *can* be supportive of the *academic* enterprise—but aren't necessarily.

Swimming is historically big at Denison. Our women routinely vie for, and sometimes earn, the Division III title and our men can always be found among the leading five or six squads. Year after year, some of my college's most academically successful, intellectually disciplined, and effective time-managing students are swimmers. Likewise, I see friendships originating on the baseball team that transfer over to laboratory partnerships, study groups, artistic collaborations, and post-graduate networks that advance professions and careers. But I don't *always* see that. I periodically find swimmers or field hockey players or golfers whose energy and time commitment to their sport interferes with their academic obligations. And I occasionally see the camaraderie of a soccer squad lead to rooming together, eating together, selecting classes together, and socializing together to the exclusion of other relationships and other learning activities. And you do, too.

In fact, if athletics in and of themselves provided all the education we desire for our young people, we'd be well advised to send at least some of them directly into the minor leagues of professional baseball, hockey, or basketball. I trust, though, that a young man I know who has participated on Denison's men's soccer team has had a qualitatively different educational experience than his brother who made a different choice after secondary school and is playing entry level professional soccer in Europe.

So how can we tease out the benefits of athletics in an undergraduate education while avoiding the prospective drawbacks? To go further, how do we provide athletics opportunities that do not simply *coexist* with classroom, library, laboratory, and studio experiences but are supportive, reinforcing, and integrative? We'll address this today in a lot of ways—through both presentations and conversations—but my focus this morning is upon *communication*. How do institutions communicate both internally and externally the role of athletics in the undergraduate experience on their campuses? How do we communicate—or fail to communicate—proportionally?

Sometimes, we communicate by how *little* we communicate. President Richard Cook of Allegheny College (who has joined us with a team from his college today) and I were both impressed at a recent North Coast Athletic Conference President's Council meeting when President Doug Bennett of Earlham shared a statement on "Athletics and Wellness at Earlham College" *passed by the faculty* and prominently displayed on the college website. It addresses athletics in the context of Earlham's educational mission, discusses the representativeness of student athletes (in multiple senses), and addresses values in competition—including the meaning of losing as well as of winning.

Earlham's statement got me to thinking about Denison, of course. I was relieved to discover that we did say *something* about athletics and our educational mission and that it could be found on the athletic pages of our institutional website. And, as far as it goes, I was pleased with its sentiments: "Through abundant and diverse curricular pursuits, Denison students are...provided with valuable opportunities for personal growth and improvement. At Denison, academic achievement is emphasized, and development of leadership potential is encouraged....For all student-athletes...participation in intercollegiate sports is an integral part of their overall educational experience... The success of these [athletic] programs can be measured by the preparation they have given student-athletes who, after graduation, go on to become organizational leaders, outstanding citizens, and true team players among their professional peers." It's not great and it wasn't passed by the whole faculty, but it's better than nothing.

But it's not as good as Earlham's statement and not as good as what two—*but only two*—of the ten institutions represented here at this institute have on their athletic websites. The most comprehensive (Ursinus College) incorporates an athletic mission statement—integrated with institutional mission—which relates to both participating students and professional educator-coaches and a "Student Athlete code of Conduct" that discusses sportsmanship and ethical conduct. There was only one other such college statement, and it was decidedly less thorough. What is more typical on the sites of just the colleges participating in this conference are scores, win/loss records, all-conference selections, national athletic poll results, coaching honors, (thankfully) academic-athletic awards, sports facilities tours, and "recruit forms." Some start out by focusing attention upon the number of NCAA tournament appearances and national championships won. I hope you'll all run to your laptops to see what's on your college's pages! *We communicate a lot by what we don't communicate.*

What *do* we communicate in a whole variety of institutional publications? Frequently, it is not what we believe or at least what we mean to convey about the proportional place of intercollegiate athletics in a liberal education. Think of the messages sent by:

The athletic team customarily pictured as an athletic *team* rather than as individual student athletes involved beyond athletics in the play, the laboratory, the choral ensemble, or the seminar.

The visual prominence given to athletics facilities. I bet far fewer biology department web pages—despite the importance of dedicated teaching and research facilities in this discipline—have a link to a facilities tour than athletic departments.

Announcements of academic athletic awards that may be fewer and less prominently displayed than those for athletic *playing* awards.

Alumni magazines that find it easier to print scoreboards of wins and losses than some kinds of markers of academic accomplishment.

Athletic schedule inserts in college magazines that far outnumber similarly-placed schedules for lectures or concerts.

Individually, none of these probably undercuts a real commitment to proportionality in intercollegiate athletics; in combination, they probably do not send the message that we intend to convey.

We communicate about proportionality and integration by our institutional actions and often by our very structure. Bob Malekoff, I think, will have more to say about some of the recent trials of our Division I neighbor in Columbus, Ohio. For myself, I continue to be amazed that the area press keeps asking “What will the Head Football Coach do?” about the athletic eligibility of students found responsible for infractions of student regulations or even of law—the implication, at the least, being that the discipline of student athletes operates outside the university’s normal student judicial system. If true, there’s potent communication taking place here.

It is not a trivial question to ask where the athletic program fits in organizationally within an institution and the message that it sends. As Southwestern’s Provost, I was often grateful that athletics reported to the Vice President for Student Affairs. That reporting structure, of course, is not uncommon. Obviously, athletics can be successfully managed in Student Affairs. Often the right personality for athletic leadership is found in the Dean of Students rather than in the chief academic officer. But my experience at Denison, where athletics reports to the Provost, has caused me to rethink my view of structure. Reporting to the Provost, athletics is a teaching department just like any other department. Head Coaches are nearly always professors, hired, evaluated, promoted, and released through the same institutional processes as other professors. Coaches are much more likely to be regarded as faculty colleagues involved in a shared educational enterprise by professorial peers. I do not know that our athletics program could not be run as effectively with a different reporting line, but I do know that we’re sending an important message about integration by placing it in a lineup of departments where it is preceded by Anthropology and Art.

Bill Bowen (Denison graduate, varsity tennis star, and Life Trustee!) and Sarah Levin, in Reclaiming the Game, describe something they call “influence by emulation” and attribute some of the arms races in athletics—programmatically as well as architecturally—to this form of communication. This is a tough one, of course. We all want to provide students with the best, safest, most functional facilities of all kinds that we can. Athletics facilities are large and eye-catching by nature. Size and prominence “communicate” to people on and off campus—often more or other than we intend.

We communicate by our conference affiliations. It *does* make sense to join with other colleges that share not only proximity and size but curricular and student characteristics and, of course, disposition toward the place of athletics in undergraduate education. Appropriate combinations allow participating colleges to speak of a common educational mission. If trust and sharing predominate, they can help reduce athletics arms races. In the North Coast conference, we’ve found it invaluable to have among our founding principles the touchstones of resistance to “marquee” sports and commitment to equal treatment for men’s and women’s teams. Recently, the North Coast has completed negotiating an agreement with the four football playing members of the University Athletic Association, guaranteeing each of these schools at least four games each season against NCAC opponents and filling two non-conference dates for North Coast colleges. What appealed to us all the most was the opportunity to forge an alliance among a larger

group of colleges and universities sharing academic ideals and a similar disposition toward proportionality.

If some communication conveying messages about academic/athletic proportionality and integration is the unplanned consequence of the form taken by institutional publications or organizational structure, much of the communication issuing from our campuses is altogether intentional. There are, of course, a variety of important communicators when it comes to athletics and education. Those of us serving as college and university presidents can't dodge accountability for the messages we send. No one has so direct a pipeline to our alumni/ae as we do. No one can have more influence upon our graduates' expectations for athletics, can better express current institutional values as they relate to athletics and education, or can more effectively explain how things may have changed since their own college years. Many of us find ourselves doing a lot of explaining. It has been a very long time since John Heisman coached at Oberlin or since Woody Hayes, Denison '35, began his college coaching career at his *alma mater*. But you'd be surprised how often my North Coast Athletic Conference colleague Nancy Dye and I have to remind graduates that the era of Heisman and Hayes is not returning to our campuses.

Presidents have a special responsibility to their Boards of Trustees. We need to keep them abreast of our efforts to maintain or to achieve proportionality on our campuses and to work with them to establish reasonable expectations for athletics harmonious with our institutional missions. Too often, I suspect, trustees are left in the dark about developments taking place in NCAA Division III or even about the issues with which we grapple at the conference level. Just now, as we engage in conversations formal and informal about the future of Division III, it seems especially important to bring trustees into the dialogue.

Presidents send messages to their own student athletes by what they do—or don't do. At Denison, I've resisted the temptation to conduct an institutional athletic awards ceremony, letting a long tradition persist of a student-organized event more in keeping with the end-of-the-year activities of other student organizations, although an "official" event could be flashier and more attention-getting. But the current practice is much more compatible with the integration of athletics with other aspects of student life. Likewise, at Denison, we've integrated the recognition of athletic-academic awards (the "all academic" conference and regional recognitions) with the recognition of all other kinds of academic honors, as many of you have, too. These are small things, of course, but they are mechanisms of communication.

Faculty communicate much about academic/athletics integration—especially by the way they talk to students, among themselves, and to others on campus. They communicate simply by the way in which they do or do not interact with athletic department colleagues as peers. Are coaches able to be in regular communication with other professors, librarians, and educational technologists without the mediation of the administration? Steve Lewis elaborated on this very point in his keynote address to us last night.

My service on the NCAA Division III President's Council has given me a new appreciation for the role of Faculty Athletic Representations—and some caution. Some of the most vocal resistance to reform legislation at the NCAA annual meeting has come from FARs. Some FARs seem much more like “boosters” than faculty representatives, and one fears that some have come into and held their posts as much or more because they follow their teams as because they can speak for faculty colleagues. In fact, seeing the same faces at NCAA gatherings over and over again, I wonder if we aren't doing a disservice by not rotating FAR responsibility more rapidly among the members of our faculties. I know that I'm still trying to figure out in my own FAR appointments how to balance experience with rotation.

Last evening, Steve Lewis shared from his experience a concern that many college faculty are neither hostile nor supportive of intercollegiate athletics but simply indifferent. Athletics is just another one of those extracurricular activities that doesn't affect them much. When this is the case, it makes it mighty difficult to secure harmonies between academic and athletic goals.

Athletics administrators communicated not only by helping to articulate a vision and an integrative mission for intercollegiate athletics but by playing a large role in who is hired, advanced, and rewarded within their units—and explaining why. They share with presidents the special responsibility of communicating with parents our understanding of athletics in the context of liberal education. Parents, as we all know, offer up some of our biggest challenges. Many have been seduced by the highly-publicized culture of Division I. Denison's strong endowment has permitted us to be generous with financial aid. Parents of student athletes sometimes prefer to ignore this and announce to friends and neighbors (in a way that is a great surprise to us!) that their child has received an “athletic scholarship,” which somehow seems a better thing. I suspect you've encountered this, too. Some parents are also the first to object if their student is found academically or judicially ineligible to participate on a team. They have often been trained by their experience in “select” youth programs (soccer is the prime, but not only, example) to feel like they *own* the coach. Occasionally, they provide the greatest behavioral challenges at athletic contests. Our North Coast Conference has had to specifically address this phenomenon on more than one occasion.

Obviously, the NCAA also plays a role in communication. “Integration” actually has a rather modest part in the recently-completed associational strategic plan (and its divisional components). When it is addressed, it is in the most general terms:

“increase the number of students who succeed academically”

“increase opportunities for student athletes to integrate their academic, athletics, and social interests”

Where is the “primary” responsibility for achieving these goals assigned? Member institutions? Secondary responsibility? Conferences. It simply is not clear that the association has fully engaged with the issue of integration. Not encouraging is the strategic goal to “enhance the leadership role of athletic administrators and increase the role of coaches as advocates for the values of intercollegiate athletics.” An authentic dialogue on “values” will require a much larger cast of players.

I'm left, at the end of these ruminations, thinking that what we most need to communicate is what the 1971 founding agreement of the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) called "harmony." Harmony is not achieved by the academic and athletic activities of colleges operating side by side, just as in music harmony is more than notes played simultaneously. Harmony is achieved by interaction and mutual reinforcement. This is what we seek—and try to communicate.