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## Lessons university-based business schools should learn vicariously-rather than through experience-from university athletics<sup>1</sup>

Edward W. Miles<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** University athletic programs at times engage in cheating, dishonesty, and other practices which embarrass the university. They can promote policies that compromise the academic integrity of their universities. Much of the root cause of this trouble is based in a desire for prestige and the need for money to support that quest for prestige. The university-based business school also seeks prestige and desires increased funding in order to support achievement of that prestige. This essay outlines four pitfalls that have beset university athletics that could well happen to business schools. Some of these pitfalls seem hopelessly irreversible. University business schools would do well to learn the lessons of these pitfalls vicariously rather than suffering through them by direct experience.

**Keywords:** business studies, business education, university athletics, university governance, competition in universities.

**JEL codes:** A2, M200.

### Introduction

In 1918, Thorstein Veblen declared that a school of business “belongs in the corporation of learning no more than a department of athletics” (1918, pp. 209–210). In 1930, Abraham Flexner asserted that, if Harvard wanted to be viewed as a serious university, it should divest itself of the Harvard Business School. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, various other authors (e.g., Marshall, 1928) also agreed that the U.S. university-based business school was not on par with the intellectual climate of other elements of the university. In the 1950s and 1960s the U.S. business school did a noteworthy amount of soul-searching about its role in the university (cf., Gordon & Howell, 1959; Pierson, 1959). As a result of this

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process business schools generally “fell in line” with the university values and culture (Porter & McKibbin, 1988). Today’s university-based business school has most of the intellectual trappings (e.g., promotion and tenure based on research, extremely selective academic journals, sophisticated research methods, complex theoretical models) of their academic counterparts across campus.

These trappings allow business school faculties to join with colleagues from arts and sciences in “looking down their nose” at university endeavors that are viewed as inconsistent with the intellectual environment of a serious university. One of these endeavors is the university’s athletics department.

Unfortunately Veblen’s 1918 comparison of a university’s business school to its athletic department has the potential to return 100 years later. The 21<sup>st</sup> century university-based business school is poised to fall victim to a number of embarrassing maladies that beset big-time university athletics. The business school would do well to learn the lessons of these pitfalls vicariously instead of by experience. If not, falling into these pitfalls could return the business school to the 100-year-old comparisons to university athletics.

This essay introduces four lessons that university-based business schools should learn from university athletics. Each lesson is discussed under its own individual section and heading below. First, as the stakes of competing increase, a focus on competition can lead to cheating. Second, competing requires resources, and universities are willing to sacrifice central values such as academic integrity in order to make money. Third, because of competition, universities will embrace practices that were viewed as inappropriate in previous generations. Fourth, many ventures which attempt to generate prestige and resources for the university are difficult to reverse once the financial and political dependencies are in place. The essay closes with conclusions.

## **1. A Preoccupation with winning can lead to cheating**

Universities thrive on prestige (Breault & Callejo Pérez, 2012; Brewer, Gates, & Goldman, 2002; Miles, 2016). They want faculty members with prestigious research credentials. They want to boast that their freshman class has the highest average ACT or SAT scores on earth. They want their football team to win national championships. Kirp (2003, p. 4) asserts that prestige is the “coin of the realm” for universities. Those that have it prize it greatly; however, the vast majority of universities aspire to more prestige than they currently hold (Brewer et al., 2002). Because of these aspirations they will pay high salaries to hire chaired professors. They will provide scholarships for freshmen with outstanding academic credentials. They will fire football coaches who do not bring sufficient prestige to the university by winning as much as desired.

One comparatively new arena for competition and seeking of prestige is the annual business school rankings. Business school deans eagerly await the

annual ranking of MBA programs (and other business school programs) just like their counterparts in athletics await the weekly football rankings. The excitement surrounding the release of the annual MBA rankings is similar to the annual race to Paris to announce this season's arrival of Beaujolais nouveau – "*Le Beaujolais nouveau est arrivé!*"

Interestingly, the MBA rankings and the Beaujolais nouveau proclamation ritual have two noteworthy similarities. First, each was initiated, in part, as a promotion to bring attention to a money-making venture – for wine merchants, increasing their wine sales; for the magazines conducting the MBA rankings, increasing magazine sales and advertising sales. Second, true aficionados of each domain (wine, graduate business education) look at these rituals with disdain for the quality of the products they promote, but that disdain is generally ignored by the more pedestrian consumers.

No academic in their right mind would believe that for-profit magazines have the most relevant insight or perspective to compare and judge the appropriate nuances of graduate education. However, prestige is the Holy Grail for universities (Kirp, 2003; Ortagus, 2016). Prestige comes from competition – moving ahead of competitors (Brewer et al., 2002). Therefore, even though business schools resent that for-profit magazines control the competition, their quest for prestige makes the possibility to increase their ranking a perfect match. Business schools orient themselves to doing well in the rankings; it is a highly publicized arena for competition, and – if a competition is going to take center stage – they intend to place well in the competition. The lure of the rankings may well be a siren's song, but the draw is irresistible for those that seek prestige. The business school rankings have dramatically "upped the ante" on the competition in the same way that university athletics has taken an intramural diversion for students and turned it into a multi-million dollar juggernaut. Some observers have likened the competition for business school rankings to an "academic arms race" (Enders, 2014) that increases expenses (e.g., tuition and fees) without truly adding commensurate value (Zemsky, 2008). Ironically, the same term of "arms race" has been used (e.g., Nixon, 2014; Prewett, 2014; Sanderson & Siegfried, 2015) in reference to spiraling costs in university athletic programs competing in facilities (e.g., stadium renovations, practice facilities) and coaches' salaries.

Unfortunately, the stakes of the athletic juggernaut have resulted in frequent cheating and dishonesty in order to win. Although estimates of how widespread cheating is in university athletics are difficult to calculate (just as any illicit activity is challenging to track), one expert, former NCAA Executive Director Walter Byers (1995, p. 11) estimated it at 30% of schools. A very predictable pattern is as follows: (1) Rumors appear of dishonesty, cheating, and/or questionable actions to gain a competitive advantage. (2) Athletic officials deny any malfeasance. (3) If rumors persist enough, they gain media attention that will not go away. (4) An investigation occurs. (5) If the investigation finds a "smok-

ing gun,” one or more people are fired. Not all episodes continue through all steps of the pattern, but many do. Invariably, some episodes ultimately result in university presidents losing their jobs (e.g., University of Georgia in 1986, Penn State University in 2011; Baylor University and University of Louisville in 2016). Consistent with opinions stated by the Carnegie Foundation (Savage, 1929), former University of Michigan President James Duderstadt (2000) asserts that, while it is the role of university presidents to control university athletics, many presidents abdicate that responsibility. This lack of control comes from an appreciation of the prestige – the coin of the realm – athletics can bring a university or from the realization that the athletics machine is uncontrollable and has too many political friends (Byers, 1995; Jozsa, 2013; Smith, 2011; Thelin, 1994). For example, the president of Clemson University in the 1990s experienced firsthand that firing a head football coach who had won a national championship was not a recipe for presidential longevity.

To our knowledge, no business school dean has ever been fired because s/he engaged in or condoned dishonesty, cheating, or questionable actions in order to maintain/increase standing in the MBA or various other business school rankings. However, we do hear rumblings that self-report information (e.g., average GMAT scores, average years of previous work experience) for some MBA programs is unbelievable and must have been “adjusted” in some questionable or even outright dishonest manner. While deans have tenure and cannot truly be “fired,” the same cannot be said for the graduate recruiting and admissions staff. In a large part because of the rankings, these people are the ones most parallel to football coaches who will be fired if they do not win sufficiently. Therefore, in a time when GMAC reports that the pool of potential applicants interested in obtaining an MBA is dwindling (Chisholm, 2015), this group has the unenviable task of recruiting an incoming class who will provide an increase in rankings (e.g., average undergraduate GPA, average GMAT score, years of work experience). It is quite easy to see that the competition brought on by MBA rankings and the university’s currency of prestige could tempt these staff members to engage in cheating, dishonesty, or questionable actions in order to maintain their job security. This concern sounds eerily parallel to the staff of the athletic department who are charged with assuring that athletes remain academically eligible to play.

Additionally, business school deans should take note of two specific points. First, when athletic scandals escalate to the ultimate level, ensnaring university presidents and other administrators, they frequently lose their jobs – not because they were actively engaged in the actual cheating – but because they appeared to be complicit in covering up the cheating or because they appeared to have too much of a *laissez-faire* approach to controlling the offending individuals. Second, some athletic cheating, perhaps as much as half (Byers, 1995) occurs as a preemptive strategy. We assume that our competitors are cheating, and, therefore, we must also cheat in order to remain competitive. The lesson

here for deans is that they can be ensnared in a cheating scandal without actually taking part in or being knowledgeable of any wrong-doing. Deans should understand that – just like the athletic department – there are high stakes incentives to cheating and that proactively establishing a culture that does not accept such cheating by their administrative staff would be a judicious measure.

## **2. Sacrificing academic integrity**

Actions by university athletic departments have the potential to influence the academic reputation of the university (Fine, 2015). In reference to university athletics, Bok (2003, p. 54) observes:

The saga of big-time athletics reveals that American universities, despite their lofty ideals, are not above sacrificing academic values – even values as basic as admission standards and the integrity of their courses – in order to make money.

This is a very sobering accusation in an institution that indeed touts its “lofty ideals” as central to its place in society. One does not have to look far to see the reality of Bok’s concerns. Multiple examples exist of universities recruiting athletes – and at times graduating them – who are incapable or marginally capable of basic academic skills such as reading (Smith, 2011). In one court case, the jury heard an academic administrator explicitly say “These kids would not be here if it were not for their utility to the institution. They are used as a kind of raw material” (cited in Smith, 2011, pp. 135-136).

The university cherishes its academic integrity as one of its most prized possessions. However, just as “The Boxer” of Simon and Garfunkel has “squandered” his resistance for a “pocketful of mumbles,” the university too frequently has “squandered” its integrity for the prestige that would come from athletic success.

Although Bok’s concern is aimed specifically at university athletics, this concern has significant implications for business schools. Again, business school rankings are a competition which provides prestige – the Holy Grail for universities. If there is a competition, we intend to compete and to win. For the pedestrian prestige-seeking universities, compromises of academic integrity for money usually involve the admission of students (i.e., the payment of tuition and fees) and the retention of students (i.e., grading). Will we waive GMAT score requirements for applicants, especially in programs with premium pricing? Will we admit MBA applicants whose undergraduate transcript indicates a lack of studiousness? Will we admit graduate students who have acceptable GMAT and transcripts, but we realistically know we can’t help move their career to the next level? Will we ask faculty to have less stringent grading expectations for students in premium priced programs than for students in non-premium priced programs?

As Byers (1995) notes, in athletics as much as half of the cheating comes from preemptive strategies – considering what the competitors are doing in the same arena. Likewise, business schools consider the effect of competitor actions. The MBA program at my home university frequently gets an inquiry of the following form: “Your local competitors, School A and School B, have offered me admission with a GMAT waiver. Will you waive the GMAT requirement for me?”

It is rather sobering to accept that athletic departments or business schools would compromise academic values in order to make money – that they would admit or retain students “for their utility to the institution.” However, in both arenas, prestige is the coin of the realm and prestige comes through competition. We have seen time and again that athletic competition clouds the values of the university. It stands to reason that, if business schools continue competing in an escalating “academic arms race” (Enders, 2014; Zemsky, 2008), the need for money and the attractiveness of obtaining it through compromised academic values will not decrease.

### **3. Changing standards**

Again in reference to university athletics, Bok (2003, p. 55) described a related problem that “the lure of money can gradually redefine and legitimate practices that were officially condemned generations before.” In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, some U.S. universities were opposed to charging admission to football games. In 1931, the President of the University of Pennsylvania implemented a policy that required football coaches to be faculty members – paid on a similar scale – instead of professional coaches. In 1938, the Chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, believing that the university should not be the minor league training ground for professional athletes, asserted that “it is a sin to go to college to play a sport” (cited in Smith, 2011, p. 79). In 1941, Notre Dame declined an invitation to play in the Sugar Bowl because the timing was incompatible with their view of appropriate scheduling around the academic calendar. Until 1948, the NCAA condemned the practice of awarding scholarships based on athletic ability. All of these practices (Bok, 2003; Byers, 1995; Jozsa, 2013; Smith, 2011; Sperber, 1998) and the values behind them have fallen victim to the pursuit of winning.

The pursuit of winning in the business school rankings game can claim a similar legacy. For example, in the mold of Joseph Wharton’s vision for the first business school at the University of Pennsylvania, early business schools claimed that a primary goal was to train managers who would conduct business in a socially responsible manner (Khurana, 2007). In the 1920s, Harvard Business School (HBS) was adamant that increasing the earning potential of its graduates was not at all a concern:

Harvard Business School carried the idea of public service... further by disdainfully expressing indifference to money. Any possible increase in remuneration that its graduates might happen to realize as a result of their education was coincidental and irrelevant to the purposes of the school. In fact the school proudly reported that salaries of its alumni were not appreciably different from what they would have been had they never attended (Daniel, 1998, p. 103).

Daniel goes on to quote a HBS assistant dean who explained “We don’t teach our [students] how to make money... Our purpose is to make them capable of attaining positions of real responsibility ten or fifteen years after they start in business.”

As the business school rankings began to take center stage, salary increase became one of the key markers of competition. What is the average increase in salary upon MBA graduation compared to the pre-entry salary? How does one MBA program’s increase compare to the increases recorded by their competitors? HBS of the 1920s apparently collected this data in order to assert that no difference existed; HBS of 100 years later collects the same data in order to assert the opposite.

When we combine our second lesson (universities will compromise academic values to make money) and our third lesson (the desire for money can legitimate practices that were once viewed as inappropriate), we see that the university’s need for money to seek prestige is a recurring theme. In our final lesson, we see that this overarching need for money, and the exacerbating effect of competition, has the potential to set a trap from which university athletic departments have been unable to escape and business schools may also find intractable if they are oblivious to it.

#### **4. The “athletic trap” can become the “academic trap”**

In the pre-Civil War United States, some plantation owners realized that slavery was morally wrong. However, these owners were caught in the quagmire of an economic system based upon receiving one’s income through agricultural activities that involved owning other humans. With the inflation-adjusted price of a single slave being over \$100,000 in today’s value (Williamson & Cain, 2016), an individual owner simply choosing to free scores of slaves had such an enormous economic impact that the owners were quite reluctant to break the status quo. These owners felt trapped in a bigger system they could not control.

In a similar logic to being locked into this economic status quo, Nixon (2014) describes university athletics as being caught in a trap that the university president is unable to control or change. Nixon characterizes an “athletic trap” in which financial, social, and political obligations have become sufficiently established that backing out of them seems implausible. Many university presidents have misgivings about compromising academic standards in admitting

athletes or in subsidizing athletic scholarships through the university's general budget (Duderstadt, 2000). However, they often believe that the die is cast:

Financial obligations, for example, include having to pay the salaries of athletic personnel and the cost of athletic scholarships, to honor long-term contracts for coaches and athletic directors and the stipulations of athletic donors, to pay debt service for expensive construction projects, and to sustain the ongoing maintenance costs for facilities and equipment....In addition, there are more informal but still compelling social and political obligations. They include promises to wealthy donors, boosters, alumni, and politicians to support or enhance athletics (Nixon, 2014, p. 9).

Bok (2003, p. 56) warns that successful athletic ventures are difficult to reverse: "Once such a venture is well underway and the vested interests and financial dependencies start to form, it may already be too late to turn back." Huge university athletic programs have numerous dependencies, and attempting to de-escalate the athletic "arms race" has significant resistance from parties with vested interests (Hutchinson & Berg, 2015).

While Robert Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago, was able to abolish intercollegiate football at his university in 1939 and withdraw from the Big Ten Conference (Byers, 1995; Smith, 2011), the "vested interests" and the "financial dependencies" of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would make such a feat unlikely today. Think of what would happen if a modern-day Robert Hutchins became President of the University of Alabama and declared that his university was withdrawing from the Southeastern Conference and would no longer compete in intercollegiate football. There would be rioting in the streets throughout Alabama, and the National Guard would have difficulty restoring order. President Hutchins, Jr. would have death threats against him and would require 24-hour security guards.

History provides multiple examples of university presidents (e.g., Angell at University of Michigan, Graham at University of North Carolina, Gates at University of Pennsylvania, Bowman at University of Pittsburgh) who attempted athletic reform and failed (Byers, 1995; Smith, 2011). Byers, after 36 years as Executive Director of the NCAA, concluded that "College athletics reform movements spanning almost 90 years have been remarkably consistent. They never reformed much of anything" (1995, p. 337). Duderstadt's (2000) observation is that many university presidents do not attempt to "rein in" university athletics because the likelihood of success is small while the risk of it derailing their presidency is significant; many see addressing Nixon's "athletic trap" as a battle they choose not to fight because of the high stakes involved. The high stakes are caused by those "vested interests" and "financial dependencies."

Vested interests and financial dependencies have a long history in the university. As far back as the European medieval university, funding has been a critical influence in setting the university's agenda (Ferruolo, 1985; Lucas,

1994). The medieval university was supported by the church and the king; however, just like the medieval king's willingness to sponsor music and other artistic endeavors (Lewandowska, 2016) there was a clearly understood *quid pro quo*. In addition to its other activities, the medieval university was expected to train the clerics needed by the church and the administrators needed by the king.

In the past 800 years, the funding sources have shifted. The university has distanced itself from the church. The king's role in supporting universities has been taken over more generally by government. However, the strength of that support has waned in recent decades. In the United States in 1980, public universities on average received 44% of their budget through an allocation from their respective states (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003, Table 337). In 2012, that percentage had dropped to 19% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2013, Table 333–10). Mortenson (2012) observes that, if the current trend were extrapolated into the future, public universities in some states (e.g., Colorado) would reach 0% before 2020.

Especially if we accept the view (Enders, 2014; Zemsky, 2008) that business schools are in an academic arms race with spiraling costs required to remain competitive, business school deans (as well as university presidents) are scrambling to establish a sustainable funding model in the wake of a 50% decrease in the state allocation.

The funding lesson business schools should learn here from university athletics is the academic equivalent of Nixon's (2014) "athletic trap." As phrased by Bok (2003, p. 56), once revenue-generating initiatives are "well underway and the vested interests and financial dependencies start to form," turning back may no longer be a viable option.

Business schools are also susceptible to vested interests and financial dependencies. For example, in the past two decades, many business schools have developed what they term a "Professional MBA" (PMBA); this program is usually situated at a price point higher than the regular MBA and lower than the Executive MBA. At our home university, faculty members were concerned that the students admitted to our version of the PMBA were of lower qualifications than our regular MBA students, acted immensely entitled, and were not as diligent in their studies. Faculty members felt pressured to lower their grading standards for students in this program. Some of our colleagues wanted to discontinue the program because they saw it as compromising our academic integrity.

However, our colleagues, like the plantation owners, feel trapped in a bigger system they cannot change. The financial dependencies have formed; they realize how much income the business school makes on these premium-priced programs at a time when state funding has dramatically decreased.

As business schools continue to look for a sustainable model to fund the spiraling costs of an academic arms race (Enders, 2014; Zemsky, 2008), they

engage in a variety of initiatives sometimes characterized as “academic entrepreneurialism.” By various methods, these activities generally involve engaging with individuals and organizations that can directly provide funding to the business school. Business deans should be aware that this description of activities is exactly what the athletic department does that leads to Nixon’s “athletic trap.” Just as the medieval university’s alliance with the church and the king brought a *quid pro quo*, academic entrepreneurialism does as well.

Although this athletic trap is certainly high stakes for athletics, it carries dramatically higher stakes for the academics of the university. Many observers (e.g., Kerr, 1963/2001; Stewart, 1962; Wittrock, 1993) see the University of Berlin, founded in 1810, as the prototype of the U.S. research university. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1809), one of the key architects of that university was adamant that a university should be free of religious and political influence. Today’s university claims to carry the mantle of the independent, unbiased arbiter of knowledge – not behold to religious, political, or any other special interests. If the business school were to engage in entrepreneurial activities that compromised that mantle, it would have lost one of the university’s most precious possessions. Whereas the fallout from questionable practices in athletic endeavors can frequently be limited to the athletic department, business schools have the potential to bring the entire academic credibility of the university into question.

As a comparison, university medical schools wrestle with the question of whether they should accept financial support for research from parties who have a vested interest in the outcomes of that research (e.g., Amiri, Kanesalingam, Cro, & Casey, 2014; Campbell et al., 2015; Morain, Joffe, Campbell, & Mello, 2015; Schoenthaler et al., 2016). In the extreme (Goldacre, 2009), the external parties state a conclusion they wish to have supported and seek a university-affiliated endorsement of their desired assertion. More generally, external funding – even “legitimate” sponsored research – has been accused of drawing academic researchers away from Humboldt’s ideal of the unbiased scholar choosing to address questions based on scientific merit rather than questions that will gain financial support (e.g., Marsa, 1997).

These concerns about influencing scholarship bear many of the hallmarks of Nixon’s (2014) “athletic trap.” In return for financial support from external parties, athletic programs will enter understandings that engender financial, social, and political commitments. However, the stakes are higher for academic entrepreneurialism. These activities have the potential to cast doubt on the university’s academic integrity. The appearance of a conflict of interest would suggest that incentives exist for scholars to bias their research reporting in a way that compromises the integrity of the university (Amiri et al., 2014; Schoenthaler et al, 2016). If the university – and its business school–loses its mantle as the ferociously unbiased arbiter of knowledge, the role of the university in society will change dramatically.

## Conclusions

A consistent theme throughout these four lessons is that university athletic ventures experience tremendous pressure to bring prestige to the university. Most universities seek more prestige than they currently hold, and athletics is one arena in which excelling with respect to competitors brings an increase in prestige. Seeking prestige implies competition, and we intend to win.

On the academic side of the university, we also desire prestige – the Holy Grail of academia – and the vast majority of universities seek more than they currently have. With the advent of business school rankings, a competition exists that holds potential to provide that prestige. And – just the same as our colleagues across campus in athletics – if there is a competition, we intend to compete and we intend to win.

Unfortunately, the pressures to compete and to bring prestige to the university have an on-going history of clouding the judgment of athletic departments – especially when they feel locked into the “athletic trap.” However, the Holy Grail of prestige and the pressures of its pursuit also have a history of clouding the judgment on the academic side of the university. For example, according to one observer, the academic uproar over the claims of cold fusion at the University of Utah in 1989 (Brooks, 2016) were driven foremost by university administrators who wanted the prestige of proclaiming that cold fusion had been accomplished at *their* university (Footlick, 1997).

An escalating “arms race,” requiring increased funding at a time when traditional funding sources have reduced their contribution has put university-based business schools in a bind. One potential way out of that bind is academic entrepreneurialism. Again, learning from university athletics, business schools should realize that ventures which appear to make money actually may not. Nixon (2014, p. 72) calculates that in 2009–2010, only 22 of 218 universities in the U.S. highest athletic classification had greater revenues than their expenditures. The balance was subsidized by each respective university. Indicative of the escalating athletic “arms race,” that subsidized net deficit has increased by over 50 percent in the 10 years from 2004 to 2013 (Sanderson & Siegfried, 2015). In part, a key principle which “is sometimes as hard to accept as it is obvious” applies to university athletics: “for every winning team, there must be a losing team” (Clotfelter, 2011, p. 116). Business school rankings are zero-sum; if my school moves up, some other school must move down. There is no guarantee that, by earnestly competing in the escalating academic arms race, my business school will move up.

I am not as naïve as to assert that business schools should eschew potential entrepreneurial sources of funding. However, I do assert that such relationships should be entered with an appreciation that a quid pro quo is often expected. Some relationships can invoke a quid pro quo that puts the academic integrity of the business school at risk. If business schools are not vigilant against the

potential to fall into the “academic trap,” descendants of Veblen (1918) may once again assert that the university-based business school is not dramatically different from university athletics.

At a time when the U.S. business school model is being replicated internationally, one group of European scholars have warned that some elements of the U.S. business school model are not sustainable and that the model’s emphasis on seeking prestige could result in an unproductive academic arms race (Dameron & Durand, 2011). Likewise, Krasnodębska (2014) has noted that Eastern European countries accepting Western institutions as a one-way form of influence is not an ideal situation. These writers conclude that adopting institutions without consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of those institutions could be ill-advised. U.S. business schools would benefit from learning vicariously – rather than from experience – that certain athletic department practices and values based in competition and seeking prestige carry disadvantages. The broader lesson for many university programs worldwide is that implementing the U.S. athletics model based on extreme competition will likely result in risks to academic integrity as well as escalating costs that will be difficult to sustain.

Universities and individual university programs thrive on prestige. Gaining prestige implies competing. The three primary domains of university competition are winning in athletics, students (both numbers enrolled and quality of performance), and faculty achievements (Breault & Callejo Pérez, 2012; Brewer et al., 2002; Miles, 2016). When the resources the university needs to excel in any of those domains (for example, talented potential athletes, number of available potential students, quality of available potential students, talented potential faculty members) is scarce, the competition will increase. U.S. universities have shown that, when the competition has sufficiently high stakes, they will engage in an unsustainable athletic “arms race” to recruit and maintain athletes. Likewise, they will engage in an unsustainable academic “arms race” to recruit the most prestigious faculty members.

Therefore, we should also expect that, if potential students were to become sufficiently scarce, universities would be quite tempted to engage in an unsustainable “arms race” to recruit them as well. Unfortunately, such a competition increases the temptation to sacrifice academic integrity and standards which could result in a “race to the bottom” as well.

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