



The Academic Performance of Black Student Athletes at Highly Ranked Universities

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## ❑ The Academic Performance of Black Student Athletes at Highly Ranked Universities

*Athletes receive major admissions preferences at Ivy League universities as well as at the nation's most selective liberal arts colleges. These preferences are more favorable than those given either to alumni legacies or to affirmative action admits. According to a new study by William G. Bowen and Sarah A. Levin, student athletes are becoming increasingly isolated on campus. Moreover, they academically underperform their peers.*

*JBHE research shows that black athletes at almost all highly selective universities with major college sports programs graduate at rates lower than black students generally at the same institutions. At some of these universities, blacks graduate at a rate that is 20 percentage points or more below the rate of other black students.*

Contrary to public opinion, JBHE statistics show that, nationwide, the college graduation rate for black student athletes is higher than the graduation rate for African-American college students as a whole.\* But at the vast majority of the nation's highest-ranked universities with major college sports programs, just the opposite is true.

There is a group of 13 highly selective universities that participate in Division I college athletics in a number of sports. These academically high-ranking universities offer athletic scholarships and routinely report, according to the rules of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the graduation rates by race of their student athletes as well as their overall student bodies.\*\*

According to JBHE's analysis of the NCAA statistics, black athletes at 11 of the 13 universities graduate at a rate lower than all black students at these institutions. At six of these 11 universities the graduation rate for black athletes is 10 percentage points or more below the graduation rate for black students generally. At the University of California at Berkeley and at Georgetown University, black athletes graduate at a rate more than 20 percentage points below the rate for all black students at these institutions. At Berkeley, only 42 percent of black athletes go on to graduate. Only at Rice University and Vanderbilt University do black athletes actually graduate at a higher rate than black students at the university overall.



William G. Bowen

\*See "The Superior Graduation Rates of Black Scholarship Athletes," JBHE, Number 38, Winter 2002/2003, p. 72.

\*\*The Ivy League colleges are not included among the highly selective universities that report the graduation rates of their athletes because these eight institutions claim that they do not offer athletic scholarships. Therefore, the Ivy League schools are not required to report the graduation rate of students who participate in intercollegiate athletics.

## At Many of the Nation's Highest-Ranked Universities With Major Sports Programs, Black Athletes Graduate at a Lower Rate Than Black Students Generally

	BLACK STUDENT GRADUATION RATE		
	All	Athletes	Difference
Rice University	83%	87%	+4
Vanderbilt University	81	85	+4
Stanford University	86	85	-1
Northwestern University	87	83	-4
Duke University	87	81	-5
University of Notre Dame	83	78	-5
Univ. of Calif.-Los Angeles	67	58	-9
Univ. of N. Car.-Chapel Hill	66	56	-10
University of Michigan	63	49	-14
Wake Forest University	82	67	-15
University of Virginia	85	67	-18
Univ. of Calif.-Berkeley	64	42	-22
Georgetown University	86	63	-23

**Note:** The Ivy League colleges are not included because these eight highly selective institutions claim that they do not offer athletic scholarships and therefore are not required to report the graduation rate of students who participate in intercollegiate athletics.

Source: National Collegiate Athletic Association.

These statistics may be surprising because black athletes at these schools are on athletic scholarship and therefore financial concerns, a leading reason why blacks drop out of college, do not enter the picture. Presumably many blacks enrolled at these universities who are not athletes must struggle to pay their way despite the fact that all these universities offer some level of need-based financial aid.

## Rethinking the Role of College Athletics

In an important new book William G. Bowen, the former president of Princeton University and for many years head of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Sarah A. Levin, a former research associate at the foundation and the daughter of Yale University president Richard Levin, show that athletes at Ivy League and other elite institutions are becoming increasingly isolated from the rest of the college community. Student athletes at these schools are admitted with lower mean grade point averages and test scores and, once in school, perform at a lower level, in relation to their peers, than their test scores or high school grades would predict. These student athletes concentrate almost exclu-

sively on their sports and do not take advantage of the full range of activities offered by the elite campuses where they are enrolled. Bowen and Levin conclude that the colleges and universities in the study should decrease their emphasis on athletics and recruit more well-rounded students who would be more engaged with the rest of the campus community.

The book, entitled *Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values*, found that students, both black and white, recruited for athletic teams make up 20 percent of the men at Ivy League institutions and 25 percent of the men at selective liberal arts colleges in the study such as Amherst, Williams, and Wesleyan. Bowen and Levin find that male applicants who are recruited by athletic coaches at these elite schools are four times as likely as male applicants generally to be accepted for admission. For women, the advantage of being an athlete is even greater. The study found that women students admitted under athletic preferences have a greater advantage in the admissions process than either alumni legacy or affirmative action admits.

While athletes are heavily recruited at these selective colleges and universities and receive huge admissions preferences, these schools contend that they do not offer athletic scholarships. As a result, they are not required by the National Collegiate Athletic Association to report the graduation rates of their student athletes. Therefore, we do not know if black student athletes in the Ivy League and the small liberal arts colleges graduate at rates equal to those of black students generally at these schools. We suspect that they do not. The Bowen-Levin thesis suggests the Ivy League and small liberal arts colleges give enormous admissions preferences to black athletes. In many cases, these black athletes are not up to the academic standards of other black students admitted to these schools. Therefore, it is quite likely that black athletes at these schools will graduate at a lower rate than their black peers.

The Bowen-Levin book has struck a raw nerve. It has produced calls for the Ivy League and the selective liberal arts colleges to reexamine their admissions preferences for athletes. The Ivy League presidents have agreed to reduce over a four-year period the number of students recruited to play football at each university from 140 to 120. It will be important to see if a deemphasis on college athletics at these schools will produce an overall drop in black enrollments at these institutions. The impact could be significant. Earlier JBHE research has shown, for example, that 30 percent of all black students at Colgate University are members of the school's football team.

#### Michael Moore on Caucasian Crime



"White people scare the crap out of me. This may be hard for you to understand considering that I *am* white. Yet, as I look back on my life, every person who has ever harmed me — the boss who fired me, the teacher who flunked me, the kid who hit me in the eye with a rock, the other kid who shot me with his BB gun, the guy who was stalking me for three years, the accountant who double-paid my taxes, the drunk who smashed into me, the burglar who stole my stereo, the contractor who overcharged me, the girlfriend who left me, the next girlfriend who left even sooner, the person in the office who stole checks from my checkbook and wrote them out to himself for a total of \$16,000 — every one of these individuals has been a white person.

"I have never been attacked by a black person, never been evicted by a black person, never had my security deposit ripped off by a black landlord, never had a meeting at a Hollywood studio with a black executive in charge, never seen a black agent at the TV/film agency that used to represent me, never had a black person deny my child the college of her choice, never been puked on by a black teenager at a Motley Crue concert, never been pulled over by a black cop, never been sold a lemon by a black car salesman, never had a black person deny me a bank loan. Every mean word, every cruel act, every bit of pain and suffering in my life has had a Caucasian face attached to it."

— Academy Award-winning filmmaker Michael Moore writing in *Stupid White Men and Other Sorry Excuses for the State of the Nation* (HarperCollins, 2001)