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# Ivy League coaching endowments raise ethics questions

By [Beth Healy](#), [Nicole Dungca](#) and [Patricia Wen](#) Globe Staff, May 11, 2019, 6:14 p.m.



A Globe review found that in at least a half-dozen cases at Yale, families endowed coaching positions or programs shortly before their children went on to attend the highly competitive Ivy League school. (BETH J. HARPAZ/ASSOCIATED PRESS/FILE)

It's right there on the Yale University website: For a cool \$2 million, donors can endow a coaching position, essentially supporting the coach's salary forever. The endowments for the top jobs in baseball, volleyball, gymnastics — they are all for sale.

Perks for donors include a plaque in the sports office, and the chance to name the endowment after one's family, or to honor someone else, including the current coach. "The [possibilities are endless](#)," touts Yale's athletic department site.

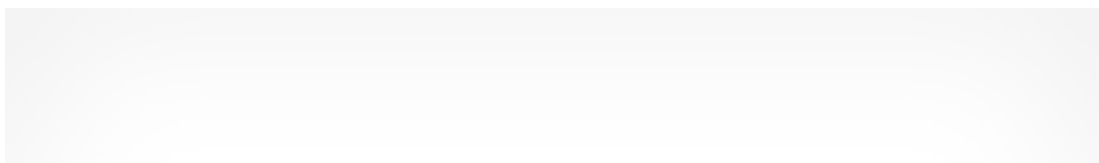
There may be other benefits, too.

A Globe review found that in at least a half-dozen cases at Yale, families endowed coaching positions or programs shortly before their children went on to attend the highly competitive Ivy League school.

In some instances, the children also would play on teams led by the very coach whose position or athletic program the parents had endowed, a review of publicly available records found.

A Dedham couple, for example, endowed the Yale women's soccer coaching position in 2013, the same year their daughter transferred from Georgetown University, and made the Yale Bulldogs team her sophomore year. One couple from New York helped endow the men's lacrosse coach, and within a few years, their son was enrolled at Yale, and playing for the team whose coach's salary the endowment was supporting.

ADVERTISING



Another family endowed a fund to cover certain costs of the Yale men's golf team, a lesser-priced option listed on the school's website at \$100,000. Their son was soon enrolled at Yale and joined the golf roster.

Yale says all of its students are admitted on their own merits, including the athletes whose parents have paid to endow coaching jobs.

“Admissions officers will never vote to admit a student who is not believed to be qualified to succeed in both the academic and non-academic life of Yale,” spokesman Nathaniel Nickerson said in a statement.

Simple gratitude to Yale, and the means to express it, lies behind many of these gifts, according to donors and school officials. But critics say this practice gives wealthy families yet another edge in the cutthroat competition to get into top schools. And it raises new questions about fairness and preferential treatment at a time when college sports and money are at the heart of [a national admissions bribery scandal](#) unfolding in federal court in Boston.

“I, as a fair and reasonable person, could see it as quid pro quo,” said Kevin Fudge, director of advocacy at American Student Assistance, a Boston-based nonprofit that helps students with college financing and careers. “We shouldn’t normalize this, and we should further expose how the business of higher education is run.”

## Growing Ivy League practice





Former Yale soccer coach Rudolph Meredith (pictured outside federal court in March) pleaded guilty to soliciting more than \$800,000 in bribes from 2015 to 2018. He was one of many endowed coaches at Yale. (CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF/FILE)

Yale was singled in the bribery case, when its longtime women's soccer coach, Rudolph Meredith, [in March pleaded guilty](#) to soliciting more than \$800,000 in bribes from 2015 to 2018. He also designated as a recruit (with an inside track on admission) a high school senior who had never played soccer.

It turns out that Meredith's coaching job had gotten a boost two years before the bribe-taking, when the Loring family of Dedham endowed his position. Meredith's name has since been stripped from the endowment, and Yale officials emphasize that the funding of the coach's position was unrelated to the criminal case.

Nickerson, the Yale spokesman, said the Lorings' daughter, who was a Georgetown soccer recruit, and other students whose families have endowed coaching positions were "admitted properly and as part of our uniform procedures for all applicants to Yale. We are very proud of them."

The National Collegiate Athletic Association does not track the number of coaches being paid through endowed positions, but wealthy alumni and parents have been making such gifts since the 1980s, initially for high-profile sports like football and basketball.

At schools with highly competitive athletic programs, coaching endowments can go for as much as \$10 million, as the men's basketball position did at Purdue University in Indiana.

The practice has accelerated over the past decade in the Ivy League, as sports teams look to offset rising expenses and tap the deep pockets of affluent alumni, many of whom played sports in college and went on to make fortunes in private equity and at Wall Street firms.

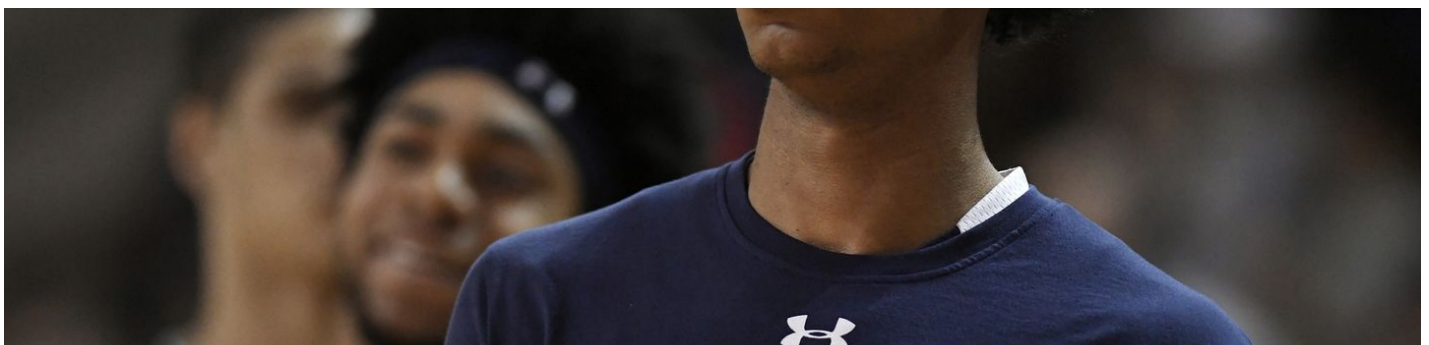
Not all coaches embrace this trend. Susan Teeter, a recently retired Princeton University head women's swim coach, said that in light of the federal bribery scandal, "There ought to be more due diligence. I think people should look to see: Are there ulterior motives?"

Athletic programs always need money, Teeter acknowledged, but endowing coaches and sports programs can create conflicts of interest, in her view. "There is just no way I would want to be beholden to some alum."

Endowed coaching jobs at the eight Ivy League universities have been established at prices typically ranging from \$1 million to \$2.5 million, according to their websites. [Cornell University boasts](#) that it has the largest number of endowed coaching positions in the country, at 30. [Harvard University has more than 20](#) endowed coaches. Many of the donors in these cases also are alumni.

At nearly all the schools, the Globe found cases where a student arrived on campus after or around the time their family had endowed a coaching position. In some instances, they played on the same team that benefited from the endowment.

## Yale stands out





Endowments back the head coaching or director positions for 24 out of Yale's 33 teams. (JESSICA HILL/ASSOCIATED PRESS/FILE)

Still, within the Ivy League, Yale stands out, with numerous examples of donors' children securing admission in the wake of endowment gifts, including athletes who would play on the endowed coach's team, or within the endowed program.

Today at Yale, endowments back the head coaching or director positions for 24 out of 33 teams, and the school has a stated goal of endowing all its varsity sports.

The university spokesman said all of the admitted students' credentials — standardized test scores, grade point averages, and extra-curricular credentials — are thoroughly vetted by admissions staff. He acknowledged that the admissions committee also gives some preference to the children of alumni and recruited athletes, as do many Ivy League institutions.

Nickerson also said members of the Yale community advocate for applicants with whom they have had positive interactions, "or for whom there is an institutional priority." He declined to say what those priorities might be, but did not rule out financial gifts as a possible factor.

Without access to private admissions data, it can't be known how the applicants who were admitted after endowment donation stack up to others in Yale's admissions pool. But few would dispute that the admissions process is highly subjective and not a level field. At Yale, for example, the admissions committee this year admitted fewer than 6 percent of applicants out of a pool of nearly 37,000, the highest ever in the school's history.

The Globe submitted written questions to Yale, in an effort to determine more about the timing of the endowment gift discussions, and if the admissions committee knew about the gifts. Nickerson declined to answer those questions, citing confidentiality.

He said Yale has a general policy to avoid conflicts of interest: Anyone in a position to recommend or accept a significant donation from the parent of a student in the current application pool is asked “to refrain from such a discussion until the relevant admissions decision has been made.”

He declined to say how vigorously the rule has been enforced, but said Yale is making a renewed push to ensure that the policy is observed.

“As part of our ongoing efforts to prevent conflicts of interest or their appearance, we’re taking extra steps to ensure our guidance is well-understood and followed,” Nickerson said.

Richard V. Reeves, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, who focuses on social mobility and inequality, said these coaching endowments raise troubling equity questions.

“This is just one of the many tributaries through which wealth could be channeled into certain college outcomes,” Reeves said. “If the lacrosse coach knows that [he’s] being funded by a benefactor, Mr. or Mrs. X, should we be surprised that the son or daughter who has the surname X ends up there?”

Coaches interviewed by the Globe said they are driven to win games and matches, and would not want to be pressured to consider endowment money in choosing athletes.

Yale has a new athletic director, Victoria Chun, the successor to Thomas Beckett, who retired in June 2018 after 24 years on the job. He has been widely lauded for his devotion to Yale athletics, for vastly increasing the number of endowed coach positions, and for driving fund-raising for the department’s overall pool of \$283 million in endowed funds.

Beckett did not respond to the Globe’s requests for an interview. Asked whether the university had

encouraged or required Beckett to make endowing coaches a priority, Yale's spokesman declined to comment.

A posting on the office of the president's website at Yale addressed a number of anticipated questions about the university shortly after the scandal involving Meredith. One says, "Was the endowment of a coaching position in Rudy Meredith's name linked to this scheme?"

The response: "No. The coaching position was endowed by supporters of the Yale Women's Soccer program in 2013. Yale has removed Meredith's name from the endowed position."

The Loring family donation to endow the soccer coach's job was described as an anonymous gift when it was announced in August 2013. Only later, after the Lorings' daughter graduated from Yale in 2016, did the endowment carry the family name; it was for a time called the Loring Family & Rudolph L. Meredith Head Coach of women's soccer. Since the bribery scandal, Meredith's name has been dropped and the endowment simply names the Loring family.

The parents of the soccer player, Bain Capital executive Ian Loring and his wife, Isabelle Loring, declined to be interviewed for this report. The Xin family, who endowed a Yale golf program not long before their son began his freshman year in 2017, also did not comment when notified about the story by a Yale spokesman.

Susan Ryan Forst, a Yale alumna, and her husband, Edward Forst, a former Goldman Sachs & Co. executive, also declined to comment on their decision (along with two relatives) to endow the Yale lacrosse coach in 2012. One of the couple's sons was admitted to Yale about three years later, and played on the lacrosse team.

Susan Ryan Forst and her brother, David Ryan, played lacrosse at Yale.

In other instances, families who funded coaching positions, such as women's ice hockey, had a child admitted who did not play on the team. In the case of the sailing team, the McNay family had one child who was a sailor and another who attended and was not.

In one extreme case, a former Yale baseball player endowed the coaching position and named it for his family.



making the donation. That same fall, one of Mazzuto's sons began his freshman year at Yale.

But the family name was removed from the endowment after the elder Mazzuto pleaded guilty in 2011 for his part in a multimillion-dollar stock scam involving a company he used to run.

Yale said it had no knowledge of the fraud, and agreed to pay back Mazzuto's former company for the funds used to endow the coach's job. Mazzuto could not be reached for comment, and his son did not return requests for comment.

## Unclear ethics policies





Asked whether the university had encouraged or required former athletic director Thomas Beckett (right) to make endowing coaches a priority, a Yale spokesman declined to comment. (ASSOCIATED PRESS/FILE)

Some Ivy League schools were reluctant to speak publicly about whether they have conflict-of-interest policies around endowed coaching jobs.

Officials from Columbia University, [Princeton](#), and Cornell all declined to comment. A University of Pennsylvania spokesman said the school has “internal rules and guidelines that help us maintain our commitment to fair access to a Penn education,” but declined to elaborate.

At Brown University, spokesman Brian Clark said, “As a rule, if a student is a prospective applicant to Brown, their family is not in gift conversations with Brown.” Dartmouth’s policy is similar, a spokeswoman said.

Harvard University spokeswoman Rachael Dane declined to say whether Harvard has a specific policy to avoid conflicts of interest in endowed-coach fund-raising. The [apparent influence of large donors](#) on Harvard admissions has come out in another prominent federal court case in Boston, where Asian-American applicants allege that they are victims of an unwritten racial quota in admissions.

Stemberg, the late Staples Inc. office supply company founder who endowed the men's basketball coach, to Kevin Landry, the late private equity executive, who supported women's ice hockey. In both cases, the donors are alumni and the endowments were made after their children had graduated from Harvard.

A West Coast institution as elite as any in the Ivy League, Stanford University also has numerous coaching endowments. According to Stanford spokesman E.J. Miranda, officials there make it clear to donors that gifts do not influence admission.

At Stanford, Bruce Dunlevie, a wealthy West Coast venture capitalist, and his wife, Elizabeth Dunlevie, a Stanford alumna, pledged in 2012 to endow both the women's and men's water polo coaches. Two of their children played on those teams; one graduated in 2013, the other in 2015.

Miranda said the Dunlevies didn't make their Stanford donation public until 2016, after both students had graduated.

John Tanner, coach of the Stanford women's water polo team, said he had no knowledge of who endowed his position until after the Dunlevies' daughter had graduated. He said she was "a premier recruit."

He said endowments help sports programs, especially in lean times.

"With sports like ours, whenever there's an economic downturn, it's one of the first things that get threatened with being cut," Tanner said. "To me, it was a huge honor and really wonderful for our sport."

Some coaches said knowing who the donor is can make for tricky waters to navigate.

"I think that's really hard," said Nancy Bigelow, a recently retired 36-season swimming coach at Tufts University in Medford, where coaching endowments are rare; her own position was not endowed.

If a family were to fund a gymnastics coach after their child graduated, to show appreciation, Bigelow said, that would be one thing.

But, “It’s a very fine line you have to walk if a family donated a coaching chair and they have a 10- or 12-year-old who is already an accomplished gymnast,” and might apply to the school, she said. “I think that’s a whole different ballgame.”

*Research assistants Andres Picon and Cynthia Fernandez contributed to this report.*

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