

Angela Lumpkin

A Call to Action for Faculty Regarding Intercollegiate Athletics

On college campuses today, probably no topic is more controversial than intercollegiate athletics. A few illustrations of the seriousness of the ethical issues include the following:

- Supposedly justified by market factors, the salaries of many football coaches exceed the compensation for university presidents.
- Student-athletes participate year-round in their sports and regularly exceed the permissible twenty hours per week allowed by National Collegiate Athletic Association rules.
- The academic preparedness for admission, seriousness toward learning, and graduation rates of many student-athletes threaten academic integrity.
- Athletic directors are businessmen (and a few businesswomen) who operate profit-maximizing, commercial businesses under the auspices of educational institutions.
- If coaches want to keep their jobs, they must win.

While these situations pervade intercollegiate athletics, most faculty members pay limited attention to them; instead, they focus on their research, teaching, and service activities. These faculty members may hope that an ethical scandal will not thrust their institutions negatively into the national spotlight and undermine their recruitment efforts for the top students or adversely affect their work. Certainly some faculty members are supporters of intercollegiate athletics. Yet most faculty members just seem to tolerate as inevitable the overemphasis on winning, the increasing commercialization of sports, and especially the reallocation of limited institutional resources from academic endeavors to cover almost inevitable financial shortfalls in athletics departments. Are these recent problems, or are they getting worse?

As early as the late 1800s, faculty were concerned about injuries in football, class absences, gambling, drunkenness, professionalism, commercialism,

and students' overall loss of moral values. To address these problems, in 1882 Harvard faculty attempted to control class absences and to curtail abuses in athletics by establishing a three-member faculty committee to govern intercollegiate athletics. This attempt was abandoned, and similar ones at other institutions were likewise seldom successful. Still, occasional studies throughout the years reported on abuses, and a few faculty members worked to reform intercollegiate athletics.

In 1929, the Carnegie Foundation reporting in *American College Athletics* provided widespread evidence of problems such as commercialism, subsidization of athletes, and loss of educational values. In 1991, 2001, and 2007, the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics examined many of the academic, fiscal, and ethical issues threatening the integrity of intercollegiate athletics and issued reports. In the 2007 report on faculty perceptions of intercollegiate athletics, a large number of faculty members said that they were disconnected from the issues facing college sports. This disconnection may have occurred because of a lack of interest, with their professorial or personal responsibilities being viewed as more important; a lack of access to the data and information needed to enact changes; or the isolation of departments of athletics as commercialized businesses. Recommendations for reform also have been made in recent years by The Drake Group, which is a national faculty network dedicated to defending academic integrity relative to the students who participate in intercollegiate athletics.

So, what exactly are the ethical problems with intercollegiate athletics, and what could and should faculty members do to resolve them? Adolescents who are highly skilled athletes are recruited by coaches, "friends of the athletic program," and self-promoting individuals often with promises of money, cars, sex, grades, and other inducements to get them to attend a specific institution. Too often, many of these impressionable young people have been conditioned to believe that their athletic talents give

them a "free pass" from attending class (or learning), obeying the laws of the land, or taking personal responsibility for their actions. In the absence of learning about integrity and other moral values, they instead have adopted the mantra that "winning is the only thing" that matters. They have realized quickly that only winners enjoy media attention and advance into the professional leagues, so many intercollegiate athletes choose to cheat, taunt, or do whatever it takes to win. Too many coaches model and reinforce acting unethically if it helps in winning.

Before intercollegiate athletics loses all reasonable connection to educational and moral values, faculty members must be "invited to the table" by administrators from both the academic and athletic arenas. Given an open sharing of information and data, it is hoped that constructive steps would be planned and enacted. If intercollegiate athletics are to be an integral part of the positive learning experiences available to students, then I suggest that the following recommendations have the potential to put intercollegiate athletics back into perspective educationally and morally and thus optimally benefit students who choose to participate.

- Admit only those athletes who meet the academic standards for admission to the institutions they attend.
- Limit grants-in-aid to tuition, fees, and books; award them only on the basis of need; and guarantee them for five years.
- Require one year of residency before competition for freshmen and transfer students so that academic eligibility is based on a student's academic performance, not on a standardized test score or grades from high school.
- Provide academic-support services to all students equally and under the auspices of the faculty and academic affairs.

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children and/or aging parents. Although men are less likely to suffer from depression than women, three to four million men in the United States are affected by the illness. The rate of suicide in men is four times that of women, though more women attempt it. In fact, after age seventy, the rate of men's suicide rises, reaching a peak after age eighty-five. Depression in men is often masked by alcohol or drugs, or by working excessively long hours. Interestingly, symptoms in men may not appear as feeling hopeless and helpless, but as being irritable, angry, and discouraged. Hence, depression may be difficult to recognize in men, and studies suggest that men are much less likely to seek help for depression than are women.

Depression in the elderly can cause a great deal of needless anguish and suffering for the family and patient. For the typical elderly patient, the symptoms described to physicians on regular visits are usually physical rather than mental. Older people are often reluctant to discuss feelings of hopelessness, sadness, loss of interest in normally pleasurable activities, or extremely prolonged grief after a loss.

Only in the past two decades has depression in children been taken very seriously. The depressed child may pretend to be sick, refuse to go to school, cling to a parent, or worry that the parent may die. Older children may sulk, get into trouble at school, be negative, grouchy, and feel misunderstood. Because normal behaviors vary from one childhood stage to another, it can be difficult to tell whether a child is just going through a temporary "phase" or is suffering from depression.

Left untreated, depression can lead to disability, chemical dependence, or suicide. For example, approximately 90 percent of the individuals who commit suicide have one or more mental illnesses, the most common being depression. Suicide is especially common in teenagers and older adults, two groups that exhibit extraordinarily high incidences of depression.

TREATMENT

It was the serendipitous discovery of antidepressant agents in the 1950s that provided the first clue that an intrinsic biochemical dysfunction was associated with the illness. Today, research has provided the basis for several theories for both the mechanism of antidepressant drug action and the pathophysiology of depression. In fact, our understanding of the molecular etiology and physiology of depression is accelerating at a phenomenal rate now that researchers have the biotechnology necessary for identifying and characterizing the complex genetic parameters of mental regulatory circuits, and their difference in normal and depressed individuals.

The good news is that depression is very treatable. During the past ten years or so, a plethora of new and effective antidepressant drugs has entered into the marketplace. Psychotherapies involving short-term, goal-oriented approaches aimed at specific interpersonal problems such as unresolved grief, role transitions, interpersonal role disputes, and interpersonal deficits, which may trigger depressive episodes, have become very effective antidepressant therapy, especially when combined with antidepressant drug therapy.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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FAREWELL FROM THE FORUM STAFF

We here at the *Phi Kappa Phi Forum* have been trying to think of an appropriate farewell to the membership of Phi Kappa Phi. "So long, and thanks for all the fishes" has been used, as has "And so it goes." So perhaps all that is needed is a simple "thank you" for all your letters, thoughts, kind words, and even harsh words during our collective thirty-seven years that we have been with the magazine.

We hope that you have enjoyed the *Forum* during our tenure, and we hope further that you will continue to support the good work done by Phi Kappa Phi. Good luck on your own journeys in life; we will miss this connection that we have had with the nearly 100,000 active members of the Society.

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- Require that eligibility for competition stipulates maintaining a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.0.
- Restrict the schedules of all sports to no more than one day of competition per week while classes are in session.
- Excuse athletes from classes no more than five days per academic year for travel and competition.

Angela Lumpkin is a professor in the Department of Health, Sport and Exercise Sciences at the University of Kansas. She is the author of twenty books, including multiple editions, a monograph, and an edited book, and forty scholarly publications and has shared her expertise through more than 170 professional presentations.

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