

NCAA athletes need more coaching on academics and career options

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NCAA athletes need more coaching on the long odds of playing professionally and the importance of academics to their future success.

That was the bottom line of a new UT Dallas study that analyzed surveys of 19,000 male and female student-athletes at more than 1,100 colleges and universities in all three NCAA divisions to determine how various factors impacted their academic performance. The study, by two School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences (EPPS) faculty members, was published in the journal *Social Science Quarterly*.

Overall, student-athletes with the lowest average grades reported that they:

- Viewed themselves as athletes more than students
- Thought about their sport more than academics
- Expected a professional or Olympic career (excluding Division III student-athletes)

Dr. Kurt Beron, one of the study's authors and professor of economics, said the findings highlight the need for universities and colleges to ensure that students are counseled on the likelihood of competing on a professional level and to moderate their expectations. Beron serves as the vice president of the NCAA Faculty Athletics Representatives Association. He represents Division III, which includes UT Dallas.

"Just 3 percent or less of all student-athletes will play professionally or

compete in the Olympics," Beron said. "But almost a quarter of Division III student-athletes think there's a chance they will play professionally and the percentage goes up for Divisions I and II."

An NCAA survey found that the expectation was highest in men's basketball, with 76 percent of Division I, 48 percent of Division II and 21 percent of Division III competitors believing they have a chance to play at the next level.

Discussions about student-athletes' [academic performance](#) typically have centered on Division I teams. The authors expected to find differences in the factors affecting [academic outcomes](#) across divisions, sport and gender. But they discovered that Division II and III players, male and female, are just as focused on athletics, which can negatively affect their grades.

"The scrutiny has always been on Division I because of the power conferences and the money it generates and the fact that these kids spend a lot of time on athletic competition," said Dr. Alex Piquero, the study's co-author, Ashbel Smith Professor of Criminology and associate dean for graduate programs in EPPS.

"Whether they're in Division I, II or III, they're all more similar than they are different. They experience the same pressures," Piquero said. "The fact is, these kids spend a lot of time on [athletic competition](#), not just practicing but time in a hotel room watching the video of the game. It's a lot of pressure for them as students, but there's also a lot of pressure for them to perform on the field."

The study found that some coaches may play too strong of a role in some student-athletes' academic careers. Following the advice of a coach who discourages more academically rigorous classes may lead to poor grades.

"When student-athletes choose a major because they think it's easier, that may lead to a lower GPA," Piquero said. "It's not surprising that coaches have a lot of influence on these kids' lives. But students also can benefit from more support on the academic side."

Contrary to perceptions, time spent traveling to games was not associated with lower GPAs for Division I and II athletes, according to the study. That may be in part due to tutoring programs and fewer distractions while on airplanes or in hotel rooms, Piquero said.

"We find support that when student-athletes are traveling, particularly at the Division I level, the more time they're away from campus, the better their GPA," Piquero said.

Researchers pointed to the need for more studies to examine student-athlete identity and its impact on academic outcomes when newer data is available.

More information: [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.../ssqu.12235/abstract](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ssqu.12235/abstract)

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