

# Athletic 'pull' increases campus diversity

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Beaver Stadium, Penn State, University Park, Pa. Credit: Annemarie Mountz

The next time you see your favorite collegiate athlete on the field or court, think again about their road to getting there.

That is something Clio Andris, assistant professor of geography at Penn State, has spent the past several years piecing together. Her findings

were published in *The Professional Geographer*.

Andris wanted to understand the power of universities in their ability to attract athletes. She and her team set out hand-scraping more than two decades of data for 160,000 student-athletes from 1,600 teams at 128 schools to find what she calls the "pull ranking."

Andris mapped the distance each athlete traveled to create broad averages based on schools and each sport.

She found that Ivy League schools such as Harvard University and Stanford University—likely due to reputation—were strongest in attracting athletes from afar. Next came less centrally located schools such as the universities of Washington State, Arizona and Idaho. This is likely due to population densities of the East giving schools a more localized pool of potential players.

Regardless of the reason, [school](#) athletics were increasing diversity on these campuses and were doing a surprisingly good job of doing so in less diverse regions.

Andris said people attending Idaho might not think they will be surrounded by people from all across the nation, but, at least among athletes, that is the case. For example, the average athlete traveled about 600 miles, ranking the university among the top 15 in Andris' findings.

"It means that these institutions are really important for drawing different people to a place that would be isolated otherwise," Andris said. "It's not necessarily a city that pulls people but it's the colleges and institutions that exist there. This research shows that institutions such as universities can bring people to the area from all over the world."

As a whole, the average distance a student-[athlete](#) traveled was 736

miles, while that distance doubled at the top private schools. The Universities of Arizona, New Mexico and Idaho ranked highest among distance traveled for public schools, each averaging more than 1,000 miles.

The sport itself also had a hand in how far—and where—players traveled. Tennis topped the rankings, with the average player traveling more than 2,000 miles. Other specialized sports such as skiing, squash and swimming had players traveling more than 800 miles.

Andris also weighed the percentage of homegrown athletes, as in athletes playing for teams near their hometowns. The results showed that schools in the Northeast had the greatest number of local players, on average.

"If you go to a University of Idaho football game or other sporting event, most of the students on the team are not from Idaho," Andris said. "You don't necessarily think that but if you go to a Rutgers game, the vast majority of the players are from New Jersey. It's interesting to think about which sports teams are mostly homegrown and which ones are importing their athletes."

Rutgers' baseball, cross-country and track and field programs all have athletes traveling, on average, fewer than 100 miles. Conversely, for the University of Tulsa's tennis program, players traveled the farthest with an average distance of more than 5,000 miles.

Andris said she became interested in the research because an institution's collective geographic diversity can shape its members' outlooks, experiences and perspectives.

"A university can start to use this data to promote the benefits," Andris said. "They're now able to quantify who they bring in and all the places they are connecting with, which is a benefit to the [university](#), the

students and the surrounding communities."

Other key findings are that certain sports are likely to furnish more international students than others and teams can create pipelines that source multiple athletes from a single country. For example, rowing teams found troves of athletes from the U.K. and Australia while skiing teams often sourced athletes from Norway.

School spending on athletics did not appear to correlate with pull power.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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