

The Elimination of Varsity Sports at a Division I Institution

A Student Athlete Perspective

Abstract The elimination and subsequent reinstatement of five varsity sports at the University of California, Berkeley during the 2010-11 academic year may provide a modern success story in college sports, but the events which transpired at Berkeley also exposed many of the fundamental tensions inherent to NCAA Division I athletics today. This success story might be read as a cautionary tale, highlighting the exclusion of the college athletes themselves within the decision-making process. While their sports were ultimately saved, these young people's lives were transformed. Grounded in critical theory, this study provides a systematic evaluation of student athlete responses to sport elimination, examining their perceptions of the decision-making process and the reasons underlying why particular sports were eliminated while others were not. Although gender equity issues were considered important to the decision, few gender differences were found among the impacted college athletes. In addition to the perceived importance of financial considerations underlying the institutional decision to eliminate sports, participants also reported feeling that the university over-invested in revenue sports at the expense of non-revenue or Olympic sports.

In the 2010-11 academic year, events at the University of California, Berkeley exposed many of the fundamental tensions inherent to modern NCAA Division I athletics. Amidst the turmoil of rising athletics expenditures, weakened institutional support for athletics, and a national economic downturn, university administrators made the difficult decision to end future sponsorship of five varsity sports. In the weeks and months that followed, the eliminated teams and their alumni launched a systematic and highly public effort to raise the funds necessary to save these programs. Ultimately, these efforts proved successful, as all five sports earned reinstatement.

One element lost in the controversy was the perspectives of the students themselves. Indeed, researchers have rarely studied this crucial element. Without formal representation, student athletes receive few opportunities to

participate in the decision-making process at the campus, conference, and national levels. Major institutional decisions, especially those concerning sport sponsorship, affect student athletes dramatically. And yet, these key stakeholders are seldom invited to offer their critical perspectives about such important decisions. The present study attempts to fill this void.

This research is grounded in critical theory and the way in which dominant forms of sporting practices often reproduce dominant cultural ideologies, supporting social divisions inherent to reigning race, class and gender relations (Bourdieu, 1990; Burstyn, 2001; Foley, 2001). In American college sports, particularly in the dominant sports of Division I football and men's basketball, colleges and universities participate in an industry based upon commodification, commercialization and spectatorship, shaped in many ways by the nation's larger cultural values (Sage, 1998). According to this critical perspective, big-time college sports are organized on market principles and the pursuit of profit rather than on participant opportunities and educational values (Byers & Hammer, 1995; Sperber, 1990; Zimbalist, 1999). Such a model of intercollegiate athletics lacks institutionalized mechanisms to secure and protect student athletes' rights by limiting the decision-making potential of the participants themselves (Coakley, 2009; Eitzen, 2008, 2009).

Utilizing quantitative methods and the student athletes' direct quotes, the authors systematically capture the beliefs and opinions of the members of the five eliminated teams about (a) their perceived reasons for elimination and (b) how the decision directly impacted their lives. In an effort to contextualize the student athletes' perspectives, this paper first provides a chronological account of the events surrounding the administration's decision to eliminate the sports programs and documents the subsequent fundraising campaign to save them. Second, the authors review extant literature concerning team sport elimination in the context of modern college sports. The remainder of the study includes results, discussion, and conclusions, suggesting that Division I institutions promote entertainment sport for profit, while raising private funds to maintain non-revenue programs. It is hoped that implications of these findings will contribute broadly to policy analyses which consider greater inclusion of student athletes in colleges and universities' potential decision to eliminate varsity sports in the future. At a minimum, these implications should inform the need to better support those students most directly impacted by the elimination of their intercollegiate athletic participation opportunities at American colleges and universities.

Historical Context: Team Sport Elimination at UC Berkeley

On September 28, 2010, the University of California, Berkeley (Cal) announced the elimination of five Varsity sports programs: baseball, men's and

women's gymnastics, women's lacrosse, and men's rugby. Both baseball and rugby have existed on campus for over one hundred years. The cuts impacted 163 student athletes from five sports. In the university's public announcement, U.C. Berkeley Chancellor Robert Birgeneau provided the rationale for the decision:

Athletics plays a valued and indispensable role in Berkeley's long tradition of excellence and deserves appropriate support from the campus. Through a variety of circumstances, the costs of delivering our Intercollegiate Athletics program have been rising dramatically, requiring growing financial support from the campus budget that now exceeds \$12 million annually. This is not sustainable for our campus in a time of drastic State budget cuts to the university that are affecting all of our faculty, staff and students. The situation has raised heated debate about the size and cost of our Intercollegiate Athletics program among many of our campus constituencies.¹

After the initial decision to eliminate five sports, there seemed little chance for reinstatement. The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics published its response to Frequently Asked Questions, and noted, "It would be unrealistic to expect a significant number of donors to immediately increase their giving far above current levels." Because of Title IX legislation, the document further stated, "Any philanthropic campaign would have to either address the financial needs of all five impacted teams or, at the very least, create a sustainable endowment to restore the two affected women's programs."² Just how much money would need to be raised for the university to reinstate some or all the sports seemed to be a moving target. Initially, the university said \$80–\$120 million was needed to endow the sports and reinstate them for the future (Azevedo & Nelson, 2011). Later, Cal announced that \$25 million was needed to reinstate the five sports for the next several years (Kroichick, 2011; Peterson, 2011).

Though neither of the fundraising targets had been met, on February 11, 2011, the administration at Cal announced the reinstatement of three sports programs: women's lacrosse, women's gymnastics, and men's rugby. According to the Chancellor, the generosity of donors saved these three teams. Baseball and men's gymnastics, however, fell short of raising the necessary dollars for reinstatement. For the second time in a little over four months, these two sports were told their teams would cease competition at the end of the 2010–11 academic year. Although this second decision led critics to call the administration's handling of the situation "clumsy" (Peterson, 2011) and "incompetent" (Saracevic, 2011a), in fact, it seemed the door had been opened for the real possibility of reinstatement. Soon thereafter, the message to the athletic community was stated in no uncertain terms: "It's all about the money." Ten million dollars would reinstate the baseball program, and \$4

million would bring back men's gymnastics for the next seven to eight years. The ultimate goal would be to fully endow these programs once reinstated (G. Overholtzer, personal interview with Cal Athletic Director, Sandy Barbour, March 7, 2011).

On April 8, 2011, the university announced that the 119-year-old baseball program would be reinstated, although not formally. The *Save Cal Baseball* fundraising group secured \$9 million in pledged donations, which was short of the target of \$10 million for formal reinstatement. As Berkeley Chancellor Birgeneau noted, "Athletic supporters are really terrific, and they just need to understand clearly that we had certain goals. All of our supporters, if they didn't understand before, now understand the situation" (Wang, 2011, p. 1). Subsequently, the Cal baseball team made it to the College World Series and provided the media with a compelling Cinderella story of triumphant reward following the university's initial decision to eliminate the sport.

The news of baseball's reinstatement meant that men's gymnastics remained the sole program to be cut at the University of California, Berkeley. *Save Cal Gymnastics* had raised just under half of the \$4 million needed for reinstatement. While the university set no firm deadline for the program to raise the required funds, Athletic Director Barbour acknowledged, "There are going to be junctures where things become more difficult" (Wang, 2011, p. 3).

A little less than a month later, with little fanfare, the university announced that men's gymnastics would be conditionally reinstated. As only \$2.5 million of the targeted \$4 million had been raised, the conditional reinstatement included a reduction in the number of athletic scholarships offered. It had been almost exactly six months since the university initially announced the elimination of five sports — and in those tumultuous months of uncertainty, over \$20 million were privately raised to save the women's lacrosse, men's and women's gymnastics, baseball, and rugby sports programs (Benenson, 2011).

The Decision to Eliminate Sports

When considering the decision to eliminate sports, universities must weigh numerous factors beyond simply cutting costs. Yiamouyiannis and Lawrence (2009) proposed a responsible decision-making model for athletics (RDM-MA), which seeks to balance several conflicting values and priorities, such as balancing the budget, complying with Title IX, and providing participation opportunities for student athletes as a function within the university. According to the author, "This requires a review of applicable laws and regulations; financial audits; philosophical discussions about the mission of the sports program; and the impact of potential decisions on key stakeholders, such as student athletes, students, fans, alumni, faculty, and community

members" (p. 51). The RDMMA is an eight-step process grounded in rational and socially responsible or ethical decision making.

U.C. Berkeley enumerated several criteria important to the decision of eliminating certain sports over others; these criteria included financial impact, history of competitive success, ability to comply with Title IX and principles of gender equity, donor impact, opportunities for NCAA and Pac-10 success, contributions to student-athlete diversity, student-athlete opportunities, utilization of support services, contributions to the Directors' Cup, contributions to the Athletic Department mission, and the prevalence of local and regional varsity competition. While *student-athlete opportunities* are cited among this lengthy list of criteria, the educational outcomes of sports participation and potential lessons learned on the field, on the court, or in the pool are arguably less salient than male-to-female participant ratios, win-loss records, and financial stability.

Sports participation opportunities are likewise central to legal requirements for educational institutions that must comply with both gender equity mandates (e.g., Title IX), and legal requirements to ensure their tax-exempt status.³ Some have argued that the increases in participation opportunities for women have led to the elimination of men's sport programs, suggesting that Title IX has systematically destroyed sport participation opportunities for men (Beveridge, 1996; Klinker, 2003; Starace, 2001). However, Sabo (1998) found that increases in female sport opportunities have not led to the downsizing of men's programs nationally, except at Division I-A and I-AA schools with the largest athletic budgets. U.C. Berkeley competes at the Division I-A level, also known as the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS).

To sustain participation opportunities for both men and women, many Division I schools continue to disproportionately invest in football and men's basketball, with the hope that these sports will increase notoriety, fan support, and revenue. These investments are meant to attract top recruits so that teams become nationally competitive and increase revenue.

One consequence of a university's focus on increasing revenues through sport elimination is that students are often left out of the decision-making process (Eitzen, 2008). In general, college athletes have few opportunities to exercise their rights nationally: "They have no union, no arbitration board, and rarely do they have representation on campus athletic committees" (Eitzen 2009, p. 98).⁴

Along with student athletes' general exclusion from the decision-making process in college sports, there is similarly little research that has documented the impact of sport elimination on the actual participants. One exception is Messner and Solomon's (2007) analysis of Title IX and individual male narratives of "bureaucratic victimization," often articulated by non-revenue male athletes whose sports were eliminated. Their paper provides a thoughtful analysis of the complex intersections of gender equity laws and

non-revenue male marginalization within the dominant college sports arena, but the article is more theoretical than empirical.

The current study offers an important contribution to the literature by providing a more systematic evaluation of student athlete responses to team sport elimination. Unlike Messners' and Solomon's discussion of the perspectives of male athletes from eliminated sports, this study examines the perceptions of *both* male and female college athletes from intercollegiate athletic teams eliminated at their university, illustrated in their own words.

Method

Participants and Procedures

The target population for this study included all 163 student athletes who comprised the active rosters of the five eliminated sports at the University of California, Berkeley, a large public university on the West coast that competes at the NCAA Division I level. Of the 163 student athletes, 45 were female and 118 were male. By roster, the numbers break down as follows: women's lacrosse (30), women's gymnastics (15), men's gymnastics (19), baseball (38) and men's rugby (61). The first author, a university administrator and professor, emailed these college athletes a link to an on-line survey, requesting their participation in the study. The students received two separate surveys.

Before sending out the initial email to the impacted college athletes, a draft of the survey was sent to the 13 coaches from these five sport programs, as well as to the Director of Athletics, requesting their feedback and editing suggestions. These comments were incorporated into the final version of the survey. Responses to the surveys were electronically dispersed through a third-party website. Participants received the first survey following the initial decision to eliminate five varsity sports. Student athletes received the second survey following the decision to reinstate women's lacrosse, women's gymnastics, and men's rugby. The response rate for the first survey was 70% and 43% for the second survey, for an overall response rate of 57%. The response rate varied by sport and survey, from a high of 93% (women's gymnastics) on the first survey to a low of 28% (men's gymnastics) on the second. Participants were representative of the college athletes surveyed.

Measures

The on-line survey included demographic, Likert-type scale, and open-ended questions. Table 1 illustrates the demographic data of the 113 impacted college athletes who participated in this study, including their sport, gender, race, scholarship status, and year-in-school. The Likert-scale and

Table 1. Demographics of 113 participants.

Sport (n)	Race/Ethnicity				Athletic Scholarship			Residency		Academic Standing	
	Asian	Black	White	Other	None	Part/Full	In-State	Out/Int'l*	Under†	Upper‡	
Baseball (20)	5%	5%	90%	0%	32%	68%	95%	5%	74%	26%	
M. Gymnastics (9)	56%	0%	22%	22%	78%	22%	89%	11%	44%	56%	
W. Gymnastics (14)	36%	0%	57%	7%	29%	71%	100%	0%	86%	14%	
W. Lacrosse (23)	9%	0%	87%	4%	9%	91%	48%	52%	78%	22%	
M. Rugby (47)	6%	0%	85%	9%	100%	0%	79%	21%	52%	48%	
Total (113)	14%	1%	78%	7%	59%	41%	78%	22%	65%	35%	

*"Out/Int'l" includes college athletes who are from states other than California (18% of total participants) and who are international students (4% of total participants). †"Underclassman" designates participants who are in their first (freshman) or second (sophomore) year of college. ‡"Upperclassman" designates participants who are in their third (junior) year of college, or who are fourth or fifth-year seniors.

open-ended questions focused on how important various factors were in the decision (financial considerations, gender equity issues, team academic and athletic success, and regional or national trends in their sport). The open-ended questions also asked respondents to evaluate the decision-making process, how students were notified, and for any recommendations that survey respondents would make to other university administrators in similar circumstances.

Results and Discussion

Pearson's chi-square tests of independence were calculated for the quantitative data related to the participants' perceptions about the relative importance of various factors underlying the decision to eliminate sports at this institution. The chi-square statistics were then used to test the probability level (i.e., p-value) of the reported results. While the open-ended questions provided a preliminary forum for participants to expand on their survey responses, selected quotations were not formerly analyzed as reliable qualitative data.

Perceived Reasons for the Elimination of Sports

Gender equity

Table 2 illustrates student athletes' perceptions of the relative importance of various factors underlying the decision to eliminate the five sports at the

Table 2. Percent of respondents who believe the following factors were either very important or important considerations in the elimination of their sports program (listed in perceived order of importance).

	Baseball	Men's Gymnastics	Women's Gymnastics	Women's Lacrosse	Men's Rugby	Total
Gender equity considerations	77%	60%	67%	78%	69%	71%
Financial considerations	92%	100%	75%	56%	33%	55%
Regional or national trends in your sport (number of other varsity programs)	23%	40%	67%	28%	57%	47%
The team's athletic success	31%	80%	83%	61%	27%	44%
The team's academic success	23%	60%	67%	22%	18%	28%

University of California, Berkeley. While most of the public information disseminated by the university focused on the financial shortfalls of the athletic department, the student athletes from the five eliminated sports reported gender equity issues as the most important reason underlying the institutional decision to cut sports. A significantly greater percentage of college athletes believed factors related to gender equity were either important or very important considerations in the cancellation of their sports program compared to factors related to finances: $t(90) = 2.26$, $p < 0.05$. One baseball student athlete wrote, "I feel as though the only explanation for why my sport was cut was due to gender equity issues." Another male student-athlete added, "The decision to remove rugby from varsity status was driven only by a need to have athletic numbers reflect the gender ratio of the entire university." In fact, female participation in athletics is not proportionate to the number of female undergraduates enrolled at the university (Thomas, 2011). In the 2009–10 academic year, 40% of the 894 varsity college athletes were women, while females comprised 53% of the undergraduate population at U.C. Berkeley (EADA Report, 2010).⁵

However, among the impacted student-athletes in this study, there were no differences by gender in the perceived importance of gender equity. That is, both male and female student athletes reported gender equity issues as the most important factor in determining the elimination of sports at Berkeley.

Financial Considerations

Student athletes reported financial considerations as the second most important factor in the decision to eliminate sports, although there were significant differences by sport and scholarship status. As depicted in Table 3, significantly fewer non-scholarship college athletes (44%) reported that financial considerations were either important or very important considerations in the

Table 3. Demographic categories with a significantly different proportion of respondents who believe the following factors were either very important or important considerations in the elimination of their sports program.

	Gender equity considerations	Financial considerations	Trends in your sport	The team's athletic success	The team's academic success
Overall	√				√
Race: Asian vs. White					
Race: White vs. (Asian + Black + Other)					
Gender: Male vs. Female				√	
Year: Underclassmen vs. Upperclassmen					
Residency: In-state vs. Out-of-state	√				
Athletic Scholarship: Recipient vs. Non-recipient		√		√	
Sport: Rugby vs. All other eliminated sports		√		√	√
Sport: W. Lacrosse vs. W. Gymnastics			√		√
Sport: Baseball vs. W. Lacrosse		√			
Sport: (Baseball + W. Lacrosse) vs. (M. Rugby + M. Gymnastics + W. Gymnastics)		√	√		

elimination of their sports program compared to scholarship athletes (70%): $\chi^2(1, N = 91) = 5.92, p < 0.05$. The men's rugby program, comprised completely of non-scholarship student athletes, reported a significantly lower percentage (33%) of participants who believed that financial considerations were important or very important as a reason for their sport to be eliminated. One rugby student athlete noted, "I think it's ridiculous that they cut our sport to save money, when we are one of the few teams who brings in more money than what we actually cost the school." This student's belief about the revenue potential of his sport is inaccurate, particularly when indirect costs are included, but it illustrates a sentiment shared by many student athletes that their teams benefitted the university with their financial contributions. A freshman women's lacrosse student athlete argued, "Our team consists mainly of out-of-state athletes. We pay full tuition. So we are helping the university, as opposed to other teams where the athletes have most [partial] or full scholarships."

Ironically, the news that U.C. Berkeley would reinstate all five varsity sports coincided with another significant announcement. The newly established Pacific-12 athletic conference heralded a new 12-year television contract worth an estimated \$3 billion, making it the largest broadcasting contract for an athletic conference in U.S. history. Schools in the Pacific-12 Conference were expected to average about \$21 million a year over the 12 years of the contract, although Berkeley noted that it estimated netting just under \$11 million per year at the start of the deal (Fitzgerald, 2011). The timing of these two announcements, which came within the same week, led to further criticism of the university and its athletic department. *San Francisco Chronicle* sports editor, Al Saracevic (2011b), wrote:

On a micro level, it's clear that Cal athletic director Sandy Barbour and Chancellor Robert Birgeneau mishandled the school's financial problems last year. After declaring that five varsity sports would have to be cut in an effort to save \$4 million annually, both baseball and men's gymnastics raised enough of their own money to be reinstated. Now it looks like a whole new stream of money will be flowing into the system. And it's hard to believe no one saw that coming (p. B1–10)

Over-investment in revenue sports. In addition to gender equity and general financial considerations, student athletes expressed resentment at the university's public investment in revenue sports, particularly football, at the perceived expense of male and female non-revenue sports. A junior baseball student athlete noted, "It's all about Title IX and trying to save \$4 million when it's costing \$321 million to redo the football stadium." A fourth-year rugby student athlete expressed his frustration with the university's decision to eliminate sports even more forcefully. He wrote:

Football is an over-bloated, cancerous sham all across the NCAA and it's hurting other students and athletes... Cal football is the elephant in the room. They make the most money, they spend the most money. Just because they create revenue does not entitle them a *carte blanche* to blithely waste and destroy material and cultural wealth.

This emotional outcry, juxtaposing rugby and football, highlights the stark division between revenue and non-revenue college sports. At U.C. Berkeley, like all Division I-A schools, football offers 85 full-ride athletic scholarships. Rugby offers none, the national championship team comprised solely of non-scholarship student athletes. When eliminating non-revenue or Olympic sports, an institution's perceived over-investment in its revenue sports can therefore be seen as denying "real" students the educational opportunity of participating in truly "amateur" college sports.

Regional and national trends. There were also differences found in terms of the relative influence of regional or national trends in the specific sports eliminated by the university. There were no differences by gender, but differences were reported within male and female student athletes, independently. Among male college athletes, significantly more rugby players and gymnasts (55%) reported that regional or national trends in their sport were either important or very important considerations in the elimination of their sports program compared to baseball players (23%): $\chi^2(1, N = 62) = 4.22, p < 0.05$. Among female college athletes, significantly more gymnasts (67%) stated that regional or national trends in their sport were important or very important considerations in the elimination of their sports program compared to lacrosse players (28%): $\chi^2(1, N = 30) = 4.43, p < 0.05$.

These differences may be attributed to the number of varsity teams nationally in these specific sports. Due to its unique history and development, men's rugby is not an NCAA sport. U.C. Berkeley's varsity rugby program competes only against teams at the club sports level at other institutions within the United States and abroad. Regarding men's gymnastics, there are only 17 NCAA varsity programs in the country currently, down from 234 varsity programs in 1969. Conversely, there are 83 NCAA women's varsity gymnastics programs, but more women's programs have actually been eliminated since 1981–82 than men's gymnastics programs (Jones, 2011).

Although there is greater pressure on institutions to consider the elimination of baseball programs due to the relative high costs, large roster sizes, and the unpredictability of weather (Wolverton, 2009), there remain nearly 900 NCAA teams across the United States (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2011). Within the Pacific-12 athletic conference, in which the University of California, Berkeley competes, every other school in the conference currently has a varsity baseball program.

Lacrosse is one of the fastest-growing women's sports in the United States. The number of collegiate programs grew 50% between 1998 and 2008, trailing only golf (57%) as the fastest growing women's sport at the NCAA level (West, 2010). One female Berkeley student athlete argued, "Lacrosse is the #1 fastest growing sport in the nation, especially on the West Coast. Two teams just this year have added D1 lacrosse in California. We have never been given any kind of explanation as to why lacrosse was eliminated, because there is clearly no logical reasoning." One possible explanation could be related to the team's lack of athletic success.

Team athletic success. Overall, a significantly greater percentage of college athletes believed factors related to their team's athletic success were important or very important considerations in the elimination of their sports programs compared to factors related to their team's academic success: $t(92) = 4.21, p > 0.001$. This finding may indicate more broadly that these college ath-

letes believe the university values their athletic performance more than their academic achievement. This assertion may be supported by the reported differences by athletic scholarship status. Significantly more scholarship college athletes (62%) felt that their team's athletic successes were important or very important considerations in the elimination of their sports program compared to non-scholarship college athletes (32%): $c^2(1, N = 93) = 8.14, p < 0.01$. On the other hand, all five eliminated sports programs at Cal tend to perform consistently well academically, with historical team GPA's around 3.0 (Van Rheenen, 2011).

The only gender difference of the study related to these college athletes' perceptions of their respective team's athletic success. Significantly more female student athletes (70%) reported that their team's athletic success was an important or very important factor in the elimination of their sport compared to male college athletes (32%): $c^2(1, N = 93) = 12.06, p < 0.001$. This finding may not be generalizable to other institutions, however, as the two eliminated women's programs were less successful than the eliminated men's programs, at least within the recent past.⁶ As one senior women's gymnast noted, "I think that our sport was chosen to be eliminated because we haven't had the past success as other teams on campus." This quote can be juxtaposed with the words of a junior rugby student athlete, who wrote. "We obviously weren't cut because of our lack of national championships... It had to be something else." These differences might likewise suggest that universities and athletic departments use a different set of criteria, or at least weigh differently the proposed criteria, when considering the elimination of male and female varsity sports.

Implications of the Decision for the Impacted Student Athletes

Student athletes from the five eliminated sports commented negatively on the decision-making process and the way in which these students were notified about the decision. Students complained about poor communication, institutional insensitivity, and a lack of transparency. As one student athlete recalled, "I got an email telling our team to meet the AD [athletic director] on the morning of the decision. I had class during the meeting and I asked my coach if I should go to class or to the meeting. He said [to] go to the meeting." Another student athlete recalled being devastated when she was brought into a meeting just six weeks into her freshman year "where the AD had police protection and told us our dreams of playing at Cal were over."

Just as students acknowledged that the announcement of the decision itself conflicted with students' classes, many college athletes reported how the decision impacted them academically. One female gymnast wrote, "Academically, I struggled. I found out about the cuts the day before two mid-

terms." Another student noted, "Although we've stayed focused as a team, our studies have suffered as our university has let us down." The impact was even more far reaching for some of these students. One female women's lacrosse student athlete wrote:

I feel slighted. Cal was my dream school. My very first year of college: my sport gets cut within a month of my freshman year, I had to go through the recruiting process again, transfer schools, and move across the country just to start all over again, fight for my transfer units and classes, and then just one month after I am here find out that my sport has come back. I left on the condition that I would never be able to play competitive lacrosse again at Cal, and now I am even more confused, angry, and frustrated. Academically and athletically it was extremely difficult to stay motivated throughout this ordeal. Now that I am at a new university, I will have to take summer school just to keep on track with breadth requirements and stay NCAA eligible.

Thus, the reinstatement of sports, while celebrated, was met with a range of emotions. Many of these college athletes were angry, but reflective. One student athlete wrote: "Had they told us to fundraise initially, rather than cutting our sport and then telling us to fundraise, all this drama could have been avoided. Because this was handled SO poorly, our team has basically been ruined. We have no hope for a successful future — we've lost our coaches, some of our best players, and we have no recruits... Who is ever going to want to play at this school?"

Conclusion

This case study of U.C. Berkeley could be seen as a modern success story in college sports; the media certainly portrayed the baseball team's fundraising and clutch victories in such a way (Brooks, 2011; Ortiz, 2011; Yanda, 2011). While many other educational institutions have had to reduce costs by eliminating sports, Berkeley demonstrated that it could raise over \$20 million within six months and save five varsity sports from elimination. This process, while painful, creates a potential model for preserving broad-based intercollegiate athletic programs at the Division I level. U.C. Berkeley finished the 2010–11 academic year ranked third in the Learfield Sports Directors' Cup, the university's sixth consecutive top ten finish of the most successful NCAA Division I institutions nationally. This was the institution's best finish in the history of the Directors' Cup.

But this success story might also be read as a cautionary tale about college sports today. The original decision and its aftermath at this institution

have come at a significant cost in terms of human and financial resources. Numerous campus and community constituents were impacted, perhaps none as significantly as the student athletes. While their sports were ultimately saved, these young people's lives were transformed. As one student athlete wrote:

I've gone through some stages throughout this process. At first I was crushed and became very apathetic toward school and other things and my grades suffered. Since then, I've grown up a lot. What has happened to me and my teammates is terrible but it has certainly brought us closer together and made us grow up faster than we would have normally. I look at life from a different perspective because I know how fragile things are and how anything can be ripped away at a moment's notice.

These students questioned the priorities of the athletic department and the university's stated commitment to the educational value of college sports. One baseball student athlete wrote, "It makes me realize [where] the allegiance of this university [is] and that it is not dedicated to excellence or developing the person but rather in who brings in the bigger paycheck." Even more pointedly, a female gymnast stated, "Don't use money to build a complex for athletes when you can't afford to house them." On the investment of certain sports over others, a rugby student athlete echoed the sentiments concerning the construction of Berkeley's Student Athlete High Performance Center: "How is it that we can build a multimillion dollar stadium and not be able to support all of the athletes? So who decides which athletes get to stay and enjoy the facilities and who doesn't? How is one sport more 'valuable' than others?"

Few of the participants reflected on a certain irony of privilege here. At many American educational institutions, an overemphasis on varsity sports has helped to create "status structures in which athletes are privileged over other students" (Coakley, 2009, p. 499). Thus, while college athletes may be perceived as privileged relative to other undergraduate students, student athlete participants in this study highlighted their sense of feeling devalued, disrespected and excluded from the decision-making process. One student athlete noted, "It would be good to feel like our thoughts are actually considered — throughout this whole process I felt helpless, fighting a system that will refuse to acknowledge the noble efforts of a team trying to save their sport."

While institutions may utilize a responsible decision-making model for athletics (RDMMA) when considering the elimination of sports (Yiamouyannis & Lawrence, 2009), administrators should seek to include the student athletes as key stakeholders in this important decision-making process. Administrators certainly seek to limit the negative effects on current and future

participants, especially when the decision remains in flux. However, respecting the participants' voice and perspective within and during the process demonstrates that these students are viewed as adults, consistent with state and federal regulations (e.g. FERPA) requiring that they be treated as such. Despite the difficult decisions which may have to be made if sports are eliminated, the opportunity for students to learn from this difficult experience and apply their critical thinking skills would seem to honor the educational value of participating in college sports.

The Berkeley story also reveals the ambivalent role of college sports within the larger mission of the American university. Institutional decisions such as these tell us volumes about the values universities espouse, such as amateurism and the student athlete ideal, and the actions they take in support of, and in contradiction to, these values. In many ways, big-time college sports has been reduced to a fevered focus on revenue generation, particularly at institutions which emphasize their subsidy of college sports rather than an investment in their student athletes. The focus has led in part to the prioritization of entertainment sports and a corresponding compromise of the educational value of sports participation. Where entertainment revenues cannot sustain the operating budget of a broad-based athletic program, forced fundraising must fill the financial void.

While donors at Berkeley met the challenge and raised the requisite funds to spare various sports, the problem of financing college sports persists. As none of the five originally eliminated sports is endowed, the fundraising simply buys time. Both the baseball and men's gymnastics programs were only conditionally reinstated, as they have not yet raised the targeted funds to ensure even the next decade of varsity competition. It is a remarkable development feat that \$20 million were raised in six months, but it will require close to \$100 million to fully endow these five sports (Azevedo & Nelson, 2011). Additionally, an over-reliance on donor or booster support comes at its own institutional price, particularly at public universities forced increasingly to privatize their operations, including their athletic budgets. The University of Connecticut athletic donor who reneged on a \$3 million gift because he was not provided enough influence in the hiring decision of the new head football coach may be indicative of this type of institutional cost (Zinser, 2011).

If financial shortfalls continue in the future, due to increased costs or limited returns from the revenue sports of football and basketball, non-revenue programs nationally will certainly face the threat of elimination. The message from universities to their athletic departments and from athletic departments to their non-revenue programs is clear: become financially self-sufficient if you want to exist in the future. Adding to the complexity of this financial imperative is the institutional mandate to equitably support women's sports programs and opportunities, suggesting that financial self-suffi-

ciency alone may not be enough. Some consider the 2010–11 Berkeley story a happy portent; others, especially the college athletes directly impacted by the university's decision to eliminate their teams, read this tale through a different lens.

Limitations and Future Research

The major limitation of this study was the restricted sample size, focused on a single NCAA Division I institution. Future research should extend this study to other colleges and universities of all NCAA divisions which face a similar decision to eliminate varsity sports at their respective institutions. As there were significant differences in this study between scholarship and non-scholarship college athletes, for example, it would be interesting to see the results at Division III institutions which offer no athletic scholarships.

While this study provided the opportunity for participants to expand on survey questions, these responses do not provide reliable qualitative data. Future studies should pursue more thorough qualitative efforts at studying this impacted population of students, such as observation and the use of focus groups, interviews and journals. Such methods would help more fully develop some of the significant results and emerging themes found in the present study.

Because each of the five varsity programs eliminated at Berkeley was reinstated, there is no opportunity to study the longitudinal effects of institutional sport elimination at this particular institution. However, at colleges and universities which do not reinstate programs once eliminated, participants' perceptions may well change over time. This is an area of potential research in the future, focusing on the rigidity or fluidity of academic and athletic commitment, identity and institutional sense of belonging.

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Notes

1. The full letter to the university community can be found at http://www.berkeley.edu/news2/2010/09/28_athletics-chancellor.pdf
2. UC Berkeley Intercollegiate Athletics FAQ. (2010, November 29). *Public Affairs*. Retrieved from http://grfx.cstv.com/photos/schools/cal/general/auto_pdf/112910IAFAQ.pdf
3. For more information, see the United States Congressional Budget Office's 2009 Report entitled "Tax Preferences for Collegiate Sports," as well as Colombo's (2009) article, "The NCAA, Tax Exemption and College Athletics."
4. For a discussion of the historical decline of student control in American intercollegiate athletics, see Donald Chu's (1989) *The Character of American Higher Education and Intercollegiate Sport* and George Sage's (1998) *Power and Ideology in American Sport*.
5. This report does not include men's rugby, as rugby is not an NCAA sport. If rugby were included in the report, the proportion of female athletes would be even smaller relative to the number of female undergraduates overall.
6. The Cal men's varsity rugby team repeated as national champions in 2011, punctuating its national dominance. Cal Rugby has won 19 of the last 21 national championships. The men's gymnastics team took fourth place at the NCAA national championships in 2011. Cal Men's baseball became the Cinderella story of the NCAA college baseball playoffs, coming from behind in games numerous times to earn a berth at the College World Series in Omaha. This feat marked the school's first trip to the College World Series since 1992. Conversely, both Cal women's gymnastics and lacrosse teams posted losing seasons for the past several years, including the 2010-11 campaign.

About the Authors

Derek Van Rheenen is the Director of the Athletic Study Center at the University of California, Berkeley, where he teaches and advises undergraduate and graduate students. He also directs the Cultural Studies of Sport in Education M.A. Program in the Graduate School of Education at U.C. Berkeley. The M.A. investigates the ways in which institutionalized sport both conflicts with and complements the educational mission of American secondary and post-secondary schools. His research interests include the connections between sports, culture and learning, the intersections of sport and school, and the history of intercollegiate athletics in the American university system. All correspondences about this article can be directed to him at dvr@berkeley.edu.

Vincent Minjares recently earned his M.A. in the Cultural Studies of Sport and Education from the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley. Currently, Vincent is the Director of Academic Development for Men's Basketball at U.C. Berkeley. Vincent works closely with student-athletes to assess learning and study skills, provide tutorial support and develop academic skills. Vincent's research interests emphasize student-athlete development in elite sport and the relationship between learning in sport and learning in school.

Nick McNeil is an Academic Advisor for student athletes at the University of California at Berkeley. The Athletic Study Center works with student athletes to ensure academic motivation, independence, and self-reliance while balancing academic and athletic pursuits. He completed his M. A. from the Graduate School of Education in the Cultural Studies of Sport and Education at Berkeley. Nick's research interests include student athlete identity issues while coping with the termination of their athletic career.

Jason R. Atwood is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley. His research interests include the relationship between physical activity and cognitive development, identifying the psychosocial dynamics of performance control, and the design and evaluation of self-organizing learning environments.