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Big-Time Sports in American Universities

By Charles T. Clotfelter. Published in 2011 by Duke University Press, Durham, NC. (313 pages).

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As a Duke University professor of public policy, economics and law, and author of several books on higher education, Charles T. Clotfelter is eminently qualified to write about the unique relationship between big-time college sports and American universities. And while no shortage of books exists which critique this balance, Clotfelter's approach is different in two ways. First, he uses a typical economist toolbox of numbers and data to make his conclusions. However, these data analyses involve unconventional ideas, such as university mission research articles viewed in JSTOR around big athletic events.

Second, unlike many academics, he is not overtly critical of the role of college athletics on a university campus. In fact, his opinion piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Clotfelter, 2010). Clotfelter calls on C Wh c V Y f ' & \$ % \$ ' k U g ' h] h ' Y X (Clotfelter, 2010). Clotfelter calls on i b] j Y f g] h] Y g ' h c ' Y b [U [Y '] b ' U b ' U Wh ' c Z ' U WWc a a c X U WU b X c f I ' h \ i g h ' m ž ' Í F U-time football and basketball fare nothing more than a couple of student activities, it would be more in keeping with academic traditions to speak \ c b Y g h ' m ' U V c i h ' h \ Y ' U Wh i U ' '] a d c f h U b WY ' c Z ' Wc a a Y 2011, p. 220).

To justify his inquiry into the subject, Clotfelter borrows from the 1929 Carnegie Foundation Report to use the analogy of a European visitor to the United States who wonders about the "peculiarly American activity" (p. 6) of mixing commercialized athletic competition with institutions of higher education. Clotfelter divides the book into three sections, each aimed at assisting the European visitor with her dilemma. The first section, "Commercial Sports as a University Function," uses the aforementioned unconventional methods to analyze the relationship between athletics and the university. The second section, "The Uses of Big-Time College Sports," presents a myriad of possible institutional benefits for sponsoring big-time sports. The final section, "Reckoning," affords Clotfelter the opportunity to suggest options for a way forward for intercollegiate athletics.

One approach Clotfelter employs to analyze the relationship between athletics and the university is to examine both the role of athletics and the university, and the scholarship

regarding the fit between the two. To do this, Clotfelter searched for the mission statements of 58 universities with big-time sports programs. He identifies these as the five biggest football conferences plus Notre Dame (the Big East was not included in the sample). A total of 52 statements were accessible. Of those, only five (Nebraska, Ohio State, Southern California, Virginia, and Wake Forest) mentioned athletics despite evidence that all engage in big-time sports.

He follows that finding with a critique of the scholarship on big-time sports and universities, noting the focus are on sports as a freestanding enterprise, not a regular function of the university. Clotfelter observes a decline in articles viewed in JSTOR immediately after Selection Sunday as evidence of big-time sports. Using data from 78 research libraries over a three-year period, Clotfelter observed a 6.7% decline in JSTOR usage in the week immediately following Selection Sunday. He concludes this decline is evidence of a shift in the academic world of institutional pronouncements and scholarship, big-time sports is seldom more than a footnote.

After applying his own analysis of the emergence of big-time college athletics, Clotfelter returns to unconventional data gathering methods to quantifying college sports influence on the university. Clotfelter observes a decline in articles viewed in JSTOR immediately after Selection Sunday as evidence of big-time sports. Using data from 78 research libraries over a three-year period, Clotfelter observed a 6.7% decline in JSTOR usage in the week immediately following Selection Sunday. He concludes this decline is evidence of a shift in the academic world of institutional pronouncements and scholarship, big-time sports is seldom more than a footnote.

to touch on a number of well-discussed externalities related to sponsoring big-time college sports: product differentiation, barriers to entry, and monopoly. In his analysis, Clotfelter notes that many spectators are fans of both professional and college football (or basketball), but think of Boise State in football and Butler in basketball as institutions which have tried hard to break through those barriers.

Continuing with his economic terminology, Clotfelter notes the many restrictions, or barriers, placed on firms seeking entrance into the market such as affiliation with higher education. He notes that many spectators are fans of both professional and college football (or basketball), but think of Boise State in football and Butler in basketball as institutions which have tried hard to break through those barriers.

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Two chapters in this section offer unique perspectives as to institutional benefits a university might realize from sponsoring big-time college sports: Institution Builder and Beacon. Clotfelter notes that many spectators are fans of both professional and college football (or basketball), but think of Boise State in football and Butler in basketball as institutions which have tried hard to break through those barriers.

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unconventional data and conclusions not previously examined in the discourse on college athletics.

Using the case of UNC-Charlotte beginning sponsorship of a football team as part of the
[] b g h] h i - h Y f b D g h f U b Y [] W] b g s e v i d e n c e o f i n s t i t u t i o n [c U ` g D I ` V i] ` X] b [ž ` 7 ` c h Z Y ` h Y f ` b c h Y g ` í g d c f h g ` d f c a] b Y b W Y into or staying in the big-h] a Y ` g d c f h g ` V i g] b Y g g í ` f l d " ` % & * Ł " ` = b ` Clotfelter uses state open-record lak g ` h c ` U b U ` m n Y ` k \ c `] g `] b j] h Y X ` U g box at home football games at eight universities, hypothesizing that politicians, boosters, and other individuals of influence would be frequent guests. He acknowledges that government offic] U ` g D `] b h Y f Y g h `] b ` U h h Y b X] b [` í a U m ` V Y [] b ` U b X `] b g] X Y ` h \ Y ` V c l ž ` \ Y ` c f ` g \ Y ` V Y W c a Y g ` Z U] f ` [U a Y ž ` c b [c] b [` W U a d U] [b ` h c ` V i] ` X ` c i h g] X Y ` g i d d c f h í ` f l d 7 ` c h Z Y ` h s Y o f f P r e s i d e n t U b o x a t t e n d e e s } shows five remarkably similar categories

7. President Box Attends shows five remarkably similar categories of persons across the eight universities studied: current university employees, government officials, members of university-created advisory boards, other members of the business and a means of cultivating personal relationships, which is the time-honored approach of fund-raisers

In his discussion of campus culture, Clotfelter addresses how sports influence quality of education a university offers noting its impact on the kind of students who want to attend the university (selection effect) and the treatment of those students once they have enrolled (treatment effect). He employs statistical analyses with data from the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA survey of freshmen from 2004. Among his findings were universities with big-time sports programs tended to enroll more affluent students and be residential campus with a high degree of fraternities and sororities. In addition, those enrolling at big-time sports campuses were less likely to aspire to write original works and more likely to hope for business success than counterparts at non-big-time sports campuses (p. 160-161).

As for how sports impacts students once they are on campus, Clotfelter uses a sample of eight highly selective private universities, four of which operate big-time FBS athletic programs, and four non-Division I institutions. Clotfelter found students in the four with big-time sports spent an average of 1:20 less each week in class and doing schoolwork and 1:30 more per week engaged in extracurricular activities (p. 164-165). Earlier in the chapter, Clotfelter cautions that although he can produce answers to how sports influence quality of education through

7`chZY`hYfĐgsummarizing the criticisms leveled against college athletics
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inclined to think in terms of costs and benefits, and not solely in monetary terms, even
suggesting benefits rarely acknowledged by universities (p. 179). Among the benefits frequently
documented by media is the significant additional attention and exposure universities with big-
time sports attract. He feels this exposure serves academic missions in four ways: inducing more
potential students to apply for admission which allows the university to be more selective;
stimulating more charitable donations; distracting alumni from noticing value differences; and
causing state governments to act more favorably toward them (p. 194-195). He acknowledges
while empirical evidence to support all four of those possibilities exist, strong support only exists
for the first one – increased applications.

After briefly discussing two items on the cost side of the university ledger, budget dollars (U b X ' Wc a d f c a] g Y X ' j U ' i Y g ž ' 7 ' c h Z Y ' h Y f ' Wc b W ' i X Y g ' costs of big-h] a Y ' Wc ' ' Y [Y ' U h \ ' Y h] Wg ' '] Y g '] b ' h \ Y ' X Y W] g 196). Despite the obvious cost and value conflicts which are present with big-time college sports, Clotfelter notes, many American universities continue to participate, suggesting the benefits realized from doing so outweigh the costs.

<] g ' Wc b W ' i X] b [' W \ U d h Y f ž ' H \ Dff Yc Yg d IY \ Wth [g] ' W \ U f f ' F e i Z Y collecting data; diagnosing the problem; and prescribing a course of treatment. Following his brief treatment of common recurrent themes such as unsustainable economics, exploitation of revenue athletes, and rule violations, Clotz Y ' h Y f ' [Y h g ' h c ' h \ Y ' a Y U h ' c Z ' \] commercialism of big-time athletics as an outside influence doing battle with the university is to misconstrue the genesis of that commercialism. In fact, for the universities with big-time sports d f c [f U a g ž ' Wc a a Y f W] U ' ' Y b h Y f h U] b a Y b h ' \ U g ' V Y Y b ' U 212).

C j Y f U ' ' ž ' 7 ' c h Z Y ' h Y f Đ g ' h Y I h '] g ' U ' i g Y Z i ' ' U X X perspective through data analysis which has not previously been discussed. His book differs from the literature in that it does not focus on one particular criticism of college athletics in the way that recent books by Yost (2010) and Oriard (2009), nor does it advocate for sweeping reforms in the way that Sperber (2001) and Zimbalist (1999) have done.

Instead, Clotfelter has sought to get at the meaning and role of big-time sports on college WU a d i g Y g " ' = b ' h \] g ' g Y b g Y ž ' \] g ' h Y I h ' a c f Y ' W ' c g Y ' to understand the same. Both Toma and Clotfelter arrive at more or less the same conclusion: that universities need to address the sponsoring of big-time college sports as part of their mission.

5 g ' H c a U ' fl d " ' & + + t ' Wc b W ' i X Y X '] b ' & \$ \$ ' ž ' Í 5 WU X Y American institutions. But the conversation cannot end there. It must include consideration of the importance of collegiate life and claims of significance that institutions use to connect with those who provide them with the resources needed to maintain and build t \ Y a Unfortunately, as Clotfelter notes eight years later, no progress has been made in this area.

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