

Donovan

WR 13100

Professor Clauss

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Note: In Donovan's class, this essay needed to be a minimum of 6 full pages, not including the Works Cited page. Your required length may vary.

No Pay For Play

Situation: As a current college student at the University of Notre Dame, I am writing a letter to the Athletic Directors of all major Division I colleges across the nation to convince them not to pay student athletes for their athletic performances. These officials are currently debating the subject, and many bright minds are arguing for both sides. As a current college student with close proximity to student athletes due to my enrollment at a university known for continued athletic success at the D-1 level, I hope to bring my side to the table and help sway their opinions away from the option of paying student athletes.

Dear Athletic Director,

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to read this letter. I'm sure as the Athletic Director you have many pressing matters to attend to, and I appreciate your willingness to consider my argument. I am writing to you as a current student at the University of Notre Dame with the hopes of contributing my opinions to the current discussion regarding the payment of student athletes. Because of both my current enrollment at a university known for continued athletic success at the D-1 level and my friendships with various student athletes, I have a unique perspective from which to judge this topic. Specifically, my role has allowed me to observe the opportunities student athletes receive as well as the consequences of various decisions made by the athletic department on all members involved. While I realize that there are many compelling arguments for both sides of this debate, I hope to convince you that it would be a poor decision to pay student athletes.

Student athletes already receive a valuable reward for their athletic contributions to their universities in the form of a college education. In today's economy, college degrees give job

applicants a noteworthy edge when being considered by potential employers. Statistically speaking, adults with bachelor's degrees are 18% more likely to be employed in today's economy than those whose highest degree is a high school diploma (Pérez). This invaluable advantage in the job market is a huge incentive to attend college by itself, but the benefits of a college education don't end there. Many studies have been conducted to measure the monetary benefits of such certification, and recently "the U.S. census bureau ... reported that the lifetime earnings for those with a college degree are over \$1 million dollars more than non-graduates" (Acquaviva). Such an incredible amount of money far outweighs the cost of earning said degree, and offers further encouragement to attend college. Upon exploring the NCAA's website I learned of your efforts to promote college athletes' successful graduation from their universities, which affirms our shared appreciation for the power of a college degree (NCAA). Therefore, I'm sure you can agree that a college education serves to compensate student-athletes for their athletic services.

On top of the benefits that accompany their impressive college diplomas, student athletes enjoy many other amenities presented by their universities in return for their athletic services. Universities often offer various opportunities for student athletes to learn and socialize (such as concerts, plays, movies, intramural sports, informative lectures, and assorted clubs) while not involved in studies or athletic events. These groups and events represent great outlets for students to meet new people, explore their personal interests, and engage in learning outside of the classroom. For example, my membership in groups such as the marketing club and the Notre Dame Student International Business Council has greatly improved my knowledge in multiple areas of business. Likewise, my attendance at events such as the B.O.B. concert and the Show Some Skin race monologues here at Notre Dame allowed me to meet lots of new people whose

interests mirror my own. In addition, there are many advantages student athletes have that regular students do not. These benefits include “the regular use of pristine gyms, well-manicured fields, athlete-only (and often team-only) workout facilities, sports medicine care, the opportunity to travel via away games, specialized meal plans and free foot gear and athletic attire” (Acquaviva). My status as a non-athlete coupled with my curiosity about these amenities led me to interview my friend, Jason Smith. As a current member of the Notre Dame golf team, Jason explained to me how the athlete-only workout facilities are filled with brand new appliances and top-notch lifting equipment, much unlike the gym I frequently visit. Next, Jason explained how the separate dining area designated for student athletes is stocked year-round with fresh fruits and vegetables along with a wide array of nutritional smoothies and cooked meats meant to maximize athletic success. Again, this is more than I can say about the dining halls I have access to. Lastly, Jason summarized his various trips to warm-weather climates such as Florida and Virginia for golf tournaments, further spiking my jealousy. In addition to all this, “perhaps the most overlooked benefits are that the school provides the player with high-profile name recognition, a dedicated fan base, media exposure, and a competitive atmosphere with proven rivals” (Acquaviva). Those aspects are certainly present here at Notre Dame, where almost every football game is a sellout and the media coverage of student athletes is unending. As the Athletic Director of your respective university, you must have had experiences firsthand with many of the amenities mentioned above. You might have even been involved in making many of them available to your student athletes. This long list of opportunities presented to student athletes represents an impressive effort that more than rewards them for their athletic services to your university.

It is also important to note that for the majority of universities, there simply isn't enough revenue coming from their athletic departments to pay their student athletes without negative consequences. Many supporters of the decision to pay student athletes (such as Dr. Dennis Johnson) assert that universities make large profits by exploiting their players' athletic success and that a portion of that profit should be used to repay the student athletes for their efforts. Regrettably, this simply isn't true. In fact, "the most recent survey of public university athletic departments found that only 22 out of 227 schools made a profit at the end of the year. The rest broke even or had to borrow money from the school's general fund" (Bennett). With over 90% of all public universities' athletic departments failing to make a yearly profit, how can they be expected to pay their student athletes for their performances? This statistic came as a big surprise to me, so I decided to research why so few universities are capable of making a profit off their athletics. It seems that all of the money colleges generate from revenue-producing sports (such as football and men's basketball) is used to fund their less-lucrative sports, maintain their athletic facilities for their student athletes, cover the costs associated with athletic scholarships, and cover administrative and coaching salaries (Mondello). As Athletic Director, you're surely familiar with how athletic department funds are allocated. It may not have even surprised you that nine out of every ten of your competitors barely breaks even each year. However, you may find the projected result of paying student athletes to be quite troubling. Dr. John Acquaviva, an Assistant Professor of Physical Education at Roanoke College with a Ph.D. in Physical Education, insists that "forcing athletic departments to pay its football and basketball players would result in the eventual elimination of most, if not all, of the non-revenue sports." Some of the fondest memories from my freshman year at Notre Dame include heckling the Duke goalie during one of our men's soccer games and traveling to Chicago to cheer on the men's hockey

team during the Hockey City Classic. If the decision were made to pay student athletes, memorable events such as these could tragically disappear. On top of that, the dedicated fans that intently follow the less-lucrative sports would be devastated to see their favorite sport cease to exist at the college level. Your role as Athletic Director and acting member of the NCAA comes with the responsibility to promote the wellbeing of all collegiate sports. Unfortunately, the current model for the vast majority of athletic departments shows that paying student athletes would directly conflict with that duty.

Lastly, instituting a “pay-for-play” model would cause a harmful decline in the level of competition seen in college sports. As it is now, the NCAA is highly competitive. Any team can win any game on any given day. A perfect example of this fact would be the 2007 meeting between the fifth-ranked Michigan Wolverines and the massively underestimated Appalachian State Mountaineers. In a game that was expected to be an easy victory for Michigan, the Mountaineers stunned the college football world with a 34-32 victory over the Wolverines. Another such example would be this year’s March Madness Cinderella team, the Florida Gulf Coast University Eagles. The 15th seeded Eagles surpassed everyone’s expectations and made it all the way to the Sweet Sixteen by upsetting both Georgetown and San Diego State. Most sports fans can agree that upsets like these make college sports incredibly exciting to watch. Accordingly, a recent article by sports writer Dashiell Bennett explained that “the greatness of the NCAA tournament comes from its unique competitiveness ... the gap between Team No. 1 and Team No. 68 is just small enough to make the tournament the most thrilling sports event of the year.” Unfortunately, this exhilarating level of competition would suffer greatly if the decision were made to pay student athletes. The same article points out that “if every college did start paying its student-athletes, the Florida Gulf Coasts of the world would never be able to

match what even a mid-level ACC school could pay.” With such a disparity in available funds to pay student athletes, many experts believe that potential student athletes would naturally gravitate towards the schools capable of paying them the most. In a system like this, the schools with the greatest amount of money to spend would end up with the greatest athletes on their team. On the other hand, universities that continually struggle to make a profit with their athletic programs would find it almost impossible to recruit top-tier athletes. Bennett’s comment that “North Carolina's basketball team could pay the 15th man on their bench more money than Creighton could pay their leading scorer” provides a sense of how dominant certain schools would be in the recruiting process if allowed to pay athletes to play. With a small amount of incredibly wealthy college teams controlling all of the best players in the country, the likelihood of an Appalachian State or a Florida Gulf Coast pulling off a massive upset would decrease rapidly. This decrease in competition and uncertainty in the outcome of games would almost certainly lead to a decreased interest in college athletics overall. Like you, I could not bear witnessing a decline in competition at the college level or the resulting deterioration in success of college athletics as a whole. Thus I urge you to dismiss the possibility of paying student athletes.

Overall, evidence suggests that it would be a poor decision for college athletic programs to pay their student athletes for their athletic performances. First, the benefits student athletes already receive from their universities are enough to compensate them for their athletic services. This is because the college degrees they receive are extremely valuable in today’s economy, and owning one can both significantly improve their chances of being hired as well as greatly increase the amount of money they make over their lifetime once they’ve been hired. In addition, the amenities they enjoy while enrolled in their universities represent a very large investment made by the university that they benefit from. These range from the usual social and intellectual

outlets enjoyed by all students to the athlete-exclusive training facilities, dining options, and travel opportunities, all the way down to media exposure and fan support. Secondly, the vast majority of college athletic programs are currently failing to make a profit. This is because any money made from revenue-producing sports is used to pay for other sports and to reinvest in the equipment and coaching that ultimately makes the student athlete more successful.

Unfortunately, this means that any attempt to pay student athletes would bring about the end of non-lucrative sports at a very large number of college athletic departments. Finally, the act of paying student athletes would change the game when it comes to recruiting athletes. The schools with the most money to spend would be able to effectively buy all the best players available each year, leaving none for the poorer schools and ultimately killing any chance of them competing at a high level. Upon reading these arguments, the natural conclusion is that student athletes are being properly compensated for their efforts already, and any attempt to pay them would lead to several unacceptable results both for your own athletic program and for the NCAA in general.

Thanks again for taking the time to read my letter. I hope you take these points into consideration and ultimately make the right decision to not pay your student athletes.

Sincerely,

Donovan [last name redacted by Clauss]

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