

The President and Athletics

Adding or expanding athletics programs has an impact on enrollment.

BY DR. SCOTT D. MILLER AND DR. MARYLOUISE FENNELL



ON A RECENT ROAD TRIP to visit colleges, a parent accompanying her son, a standout high school student athlete, remarked, "He's seriously considering schools he wouldn't even have looked at before if he thinks he can play there."

The intensity and frequency with which today's students are participating in college-sponsored athletics surpass that of their parents' generation. NCAA statistics show that as many as two-thirds of students on many campuses now participate at some level in organized campus-based athletics, and the rate is growing at about two percent per year.

We studied progress at five institutions categorized as residential liberal arts colleges that utilized new athletic facilities as a way to build enrollment and increase operating revenues, while fostering a greater sense of community and energy on campus. Two of the colleges utilized private bond offerings, financing the improvements over 20 years with payments drawn from growth revenues. Two utilized private donor and corporate sponsor support, and the final institution drew upon institutional reserves.

Although of varying sizes and regions, each institution has a visionary president who strategically set goals that would lead to a specific outcome. In each case, the enhanced athletic offerings and facilities formed a critical component of an institutional renaissance. Recruiting and institutional effectiveness were enhanced in these ways.

Boosting 'Curb' Appeal

These transformative presidents demonstrated a keen understanding that buildings, especially health, fitness and athletic-related facilities and amenities, are an integral component of strategic success. As our colleague Dr. Walter M. Bortz III, former president of Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia, states, "Ensuring that the campus has curb appeal and is filled with first-class technology, faculty and facilities helps to guarantee the necessary enrollment to keep the enterprise operational and growing."

Expanding Reach and Territory

Two mid-Atlantic colleges that we studied wanted to utilize new recruiting territories to change the institutional culture and grow. Completion of the facility upgrades enabled them to expand athletic program offerings to include larger varsity-football squads,

a junior-varsity team, lacrosse and field hockey. One added water polo. All resulted in new territory and reach while also positively impacting recruitment and retention of student-athletes at the recreational and club levels.

Creating New Niches

When a college in the South initiated a football program, the 80 players on the roster and the excitement of the new sport created a healthy buzz on campus. However, the biggest boost, academically and financially, was the addition of a marching band. College officials report that the band grew from 30 to 100 students in a five-year span; the music department had to increase faculty to meet the need.

Fostering a New Brand of Coach

Finally, the revitalized facilities also enabled each college to attract a new brand of coach. "These coaches are essentially an extension of the enrollment office. Coaches are given a number of scholar-athletes for whom they are accountable. Most coaches approach their new challenge with a fire of success," states a presidential colleague.

"Now, some of the best students are outstanding leaders, and thus, the ability to package small college sports and academics is extremely attractive," one veteran mentor says. The result for admissions has been startling. Each institution saw a six-year increase of at least 26 percent, with one doubling its enrollment during that period.

These results are revealing for presidents and chief enrollment officers: expanded athletic offerings, enhanced facilities and amenities and even marching bands can create momentum and energy while boosting enrollment — and over time, these initiatives will pay for themselves with increased tuition revenue. **EPH**

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