

■ Readings

WILLIAM F. SHUGHART II

Why Not a Football Degree?

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This essay originally appeared in the Wall Street Journal in 1990 and was updated by Shughart in 2007. As you read his proposal, notice that Shughart dismisses as "half-measures" (paragraph 3) the efforts by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to solve the problem of "loss of amateurism in college sports" (2). In their place, he offers a three-pronged solution designed to help student athletes succeed in their academic studies as well as in their collegiate sports careers and also to eliminate what he calls "illegal financial inducements" (11) while at the same time removing the "built-in advantages" (14) of the most successful college sports programs. Consider how well Shughart's three "suggestions" (3) would work together to offer a complete solution to the problem.

The college football career of 2006's Heisman Trophy winner, Ohio State University quarterback Troy Smith, nearly was cut short at the end of his sophomore year following allegations that he had accepted \$500 from a Buckeye booster. He was barred from playing in the 2005 Alamo Bowl and the next season's opener against Miami (Ohio). Quarterback Rhett Bomar was dismissed from the University of Oklahoma's football team after it was disclosed that he had earned substantially more than justified by the number of hours worked during the summer of 2006 at a job arranged for him by a patron of OU athletics. As a result of charges that, from 1993 to 1998, Coach Clem Haskins paid to have more than 400 term papers ghost-written for 18 of his players, the post-season tournament victories credited to the University of Minnesota's basketball team were erased from the NCAA's record books and the program was placed on a four-year probation from which it has not yet recovered. In recent years, gambling and point-

shaving scandals have rocked the basketball programs at Arizona State, Northwestern, and Florida; player suspensions and other penalties have been handed out for illegal betting on games by members of the Boston University, Florida State, and University of Maryland football teams.

Each of these events, which are only the latest revelations in long series of NCAA rule violations, has generated the usual hand wringing about the apparent loss of amateurism in college sports. Nostalgia for supposedly simpler times when love of the game and not money was the driving force in intercollegiate athletics has led to all sorts of reform proposals. The NCAA's decision in the late 1980s to require its member institutions to make public athletes graduation rates is perhaps the least controversial example. Proposition 48's mandate that freshman athletes must meet more stringent test score and grade point requirements to participate in NCAA-sanctioned contests than is demanded of entering non student-athletes has been criticized as a naked attempt to discriminate against disadvantaged (and mostly minority) high-school graduates who see college sports as a way out of poverty.

But whether or not one supports any particular reform proposal, there seems to be a general consensus that something must be done. If so, why stop at half-measures? I hereby offer three suggestions for solving the crisis in college athletics.

1. *Create four-year degree programs in football and basketball.* Many colleges and universities grant bachelors' degrees in vocational subjects. Art, drama, and music are a few examples, but there are others. Undergraduates who major in these areas typically are required to spend only about one of their four years in introductory English, math, history and science courses; the remainder of their time is spent in the studio, the theater or the practice hall honing the creative talents they will later sell as professionals.

Although a college education is no more necessary for success in the art world than it is in the world of sports, no similar option is available for students whose talents lie on the athletic field or in the gym. Majoring in physical education is a possibility, of course, but while PE is hardly a rigorous, demanding discipline, undergraduates pursuing a degree in that major normally must spend many more hours in the classroom than their counterparts who are preparing for careers on the stage. While the music major is receiving academic credit for practice sessions and recitals, the PE major is studying and taking exams in kinesiology, exercise physiology and nutrition. Why should academic credit be given for practicing the violin, but not for practicing a three-point shot?

PATRICK O'MALLEY

More Testing, More Learning

Patrick O'Malley wrote the following proposal while he was a first-year college student. He proposes that college professors give students frequent brief examinations in addition to the usual midterm and final exams. After discussing his unusual rhetorical situation—a student advising teachers on how to plan their courses—with his instructor, O'Malley decided to revise the essay into the form of an open letter to professors on his campus, a letter that might appear in the campus newspaper.

O'Malley's essay may strike you as unusually authoritative. This air of authority is due in large part to what O'Malley learned from interviewing two professors (his writing instructor and the writing program director) and several students in his classes. As you read, notice particularly how O'Malley responds to the objections to his proposal that he expects many professors to raise as well as their preferred solutions to the problem he identifies.

It's late at night. The final's tomorrow. You got a C on the midterm, so this one will make or break you. Will it be like the midterm? Did you study enough? Did you study the right things? It's too late to drop the course. So what happens if you fail? No time to worry about that now—you've got a ton of notes to go over.

Although this last-minute anxiety about midterm and final exams is only too familiar to most college students, many professors may not realize how such major, infrequent, high-stakes exams work against the best interests of students both psychologically and intellectually. They cause unnecessary amounts of stress, placing too much importance on one or two days in the students' entire term and judging ability on a single or dual performance. They don't encourage frequent study, and they fail to inspire students' best performance. If professors gave additional brief exams at frequent intervals, students would learn more, study more regularly, worry less, and perform better on midterms, finals, and other papers and projects.

Ideally, a professor would give an in-class test or quiz after each unit, chapter, or focus of study, depending on the type of class and course material. A physics class might require a test on concepts after every chapter covered, while a history class could necessitate quizzes covering certain time periods or major events. These exams should be given weekly or at least twice monthly. Whenever possible, they should consist of two or three essay questions rather than many multiple-choice or short-answer questions. To preserve class time for lecture and discussion, exams should take no more than 15 or 20 minutes.

The main reason that professors should give frequent exams is that when they do and when they provide feedback to students on how well they are doing, students learn more in the course and perform better on major exams, projects, and papers. It makes sense that in a challenging course containing a great deal of material, students will learn more of it and put it to better use if they have to apply or "practice" it frequently on exams, which also helps them find out how much they are learning and what they need to go over again. A recent Harvard study notes students' "strong preference for frequent evaluation in a course." Harvard students feel they learn least in courses that have "only a midterm and a final exam, with no other personal evaluation." They believe they learn most in courses with "many opportunities to see how they are doing" (Light, 1990, p. 32). In a review of a number of studies of student learning, Frederiksen (1984) reports that students who take weekly quizzes achieve higher scores on final exams than students who take only a midterm exam and that testing increases retention of material tested.

Another, closely related argument in favor of multiple exams is that they encourage students to improve their study habits. Greater frequency in test taking means greater frequency in studying for tests. Students prone to cramming will be required—or at least strongly motivated—to open their textbooks and notebooks more often, making them less likely to resort to long, kamikaze nights of studying for major exams. Since there is so much to be learned in the typical course, it makes sense that frequent, careful study and review are highly beneficial. But students need motivation to study regularly, and nothing works like an exam. If students had frequent exams in all their courses, they would have to schedule study time each week and gradually would develop a habit of frequent study. It might be argued that students are adults who have to learn how to manage their own lives, but learning history or physics is more complicated than learning to drive a car or balance a checkbook. Students need coaching and practice in learning. The right way to learn new material needs to become a habit, and I believe that frequent exams are key to developing good habits of study and learning. The Harvard study concludes that "tying regular evaluations to good course organization enables students to plan their work more than a few days in advance. If quizzes and homework are scheduled on specific days, students plan their work to capitalize on them" (Light, 1990, p. 33).

By encouraging regular study habits, frequent exams would also decrease anxiety by reducing the procrastination that produces anxiety. Students would benefit psychologically if they were not subjected to the emotional ups and downs caused by major exams,

JEFF VARLEY

High-School Starting Time

Jeff Varley wrote this essay for a first-year college composition course. As you read, think about your own experiences waking up early to attend class. How well do you think that Varley supports his proposed solution?

The other readings in this chapter are followed by reading and writing activities. Following this reading, however, you are on your own to decide how to read for meaning and read like a writer.

Varley's ironic statement and realistic scenario catch readers' attention.

Ah, sweet memories of high school: waking up at 6:30 in the morning, stumbling into the bathroom to get ready for the day, dressing while still half asleep, munching a piece of toast while listening to our parents tell us that if we just went to bed earlier we wouldn't be so sleepy in the morning (or worse, listening to our parents call us lazy), catching the bus as the sun began to top the trees, and wandering into our first period classes merely to lay our head down on our desks to doze off for the next fifty-five minutes.

We never could seem to catch up on our sleep, especially during the week. And even if we followed our parents' advice and tried going to bed earlier, the earlier bed time did not make much, if any, difference in how awake we were the next morning. In fact, for those of us who tried going to bed earlier, we generally just lay there until 10:30 or 11:00 before finally going to sleep. The next school morning we were still as tired as when we had gone to bed later.

But recent studies have provided evidence that the sleep patterns for adolescents are significantly different from those of both young children and adults. Studies by Mary Carskadon, a professor of psychiatry and human behavior at the Brown University School of Medicine and Director of Sleep and Chronobiology Research at E. P. Bradley Hospital in East Providence, Rhode Island, on sleep patterns in people revealed that adolescents, as opposed to younger children or adults, actually function better when they go to bed later and awake later. Professor Carskadon's research demonstrates that most adolescents' biological clocks are naturally set to a different pattern than the clocks of most children and adults.

To lend authority to his introduction of the problem, Varley cites research findings.

4 The timing of the need for sleep also shows biological changes as children reach puberty. Melatonin, a hormone produced in the pineal gland, is an indicator for the biological clock that influences wake/sleep cycles. Carefully controlled studies found that "more mature adolescents had a later timing of the termination of melatonin secretion" (Carskadon 351). This indicates that postpubescent teens have a biological need to sleep later in the morning. The impact of forcing people to try to be alert when every nerve in their body is begging for more sleep can only be negative. This discovery has a major impact on high-school students who are required to awaken early in order to arrive at school early, for asking teens to learn a complex subject, such as math, science, or English, before the brain is awake is futile.

5 Tardiness, poor grades, depression, automobile accidents, after-school-on-the-job accidents, and general lethargy have all been identified as the consequences of insufficient sleep among high-school students. Yet school districts persist in retaining high-school starting times that begin early in the morning, usually around 7:30 a.m. But such an early starting time does not benefit the students for whom the educational system is supposedly structured. How do we resolve the conflict of early high-school starting times versus sleepy students?

6 One obvious solution would be to start high-school classes later in the morning. A later starting time for high schools can be a controversial proposal if all of the affected parties are not consulted and kept informed. Kyla Wahlstrom of the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at the University of Minnesota pointed out that "changing a school's starting time provokes the same kind of emotional reaction from stakeholders as closing a school or changing a school's attendance area" (Wahlstrom 346). Presumably, if parents and other interested parties knew about Carskadon's research, they would be more willing to consider changing the start time for high school.

7 Some schools have recognized the benefits of later starting time and have implemented a new schedule. One such school is located in eastern Minnesota. In 1996 the Edina School District pushed back the start

Note the use of the rhetorical citation Works Cited list of the essay.

Varley lists the negative effects to emphasize the problem's seriousness.

This rhetorical question makes a transitional presentation of the problem. Note that he implicitly anticipates the objection that counterargues the proposal.