



REIMAGINING COLLEGE SPORT IN AN ERA OF TRANSFORMATION

A narrative review of scholarship & examples of sport-
centric curricula within higher education

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*The Knight Commission engaged independent researchers to produce this white paper. The Commission has discussed this topic in prior years and its interest is elevated in advancing consideration as the FCS & IAAA Athletics Directors Associations propose ways to make athletics participation more integrated in the academic mission.

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Reimagining College Sport in an Era of Transformation:

A narrative review of academic scholarship addressing the athletic-academic nexus

Let's get to the heart of the criticism that the attention paid to athletics is overblown, almost always coupled with skepticism over its academic contribution. The dominant argument goes that sports pull students away from their studies without adding anything academically legitimate. But to what extent is that simply an observation about the particular niche that sports has been driven to at the university rather than an invitation to open discussion about the academic legitimacy of college sports?

—Rodney Fort, Professor Emeritus, Kinesiology, University of Michigan¹

Rodney Fort's quote reframes the criticisms of college sport as an opportunity to rethink the role of athletics within higher education, challenging the belief that sports should remain siloed from the broader educational mission and organizational structure. As college sports undergo transformative changes—such as conference realignment, the rise of the transfer portal, the implementation of name, image, and likeness (NIL) policies, discussions of media revenue sharing, and the uncertain future of the NCAA—this moment presents a pivotal opportunity to reimagine a new collegiate model.² Such a model would legitimize the academic value of sports and foster a deeper integration between classrooms and fields of play.³

Modern literature exploring this idea emerged in 1995 when cultural historians Michael Oriard and Elliot Gorn advocated for the academy to take sports seriously in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.⁴ The idea reemerged in the *Chronicle* in 2003⁵, then in 2006, former university and NCAA president Myles Brand introduced the Integrated View of Intercollegiate Athletics,³ offering a transformative perspective on the educational value of intercollegiate athletics. Brand contended that intercollegiate athletics were similar to performance art majors like music, theatre and dance in the types of educational experiences, in combining theoretical and practical knowledge, and in developing character virtues. His vision positioned athletics as essential to the mission of universities, emphasizing its role in holistically developing students and aligning with broader educational goals.³ Brand's Integrated View directly challenged the long-standing structure of Intercollegiate Athletics as strictly extracurricular, separate from an institution's core mission, and often valued primarily for its entertainment appeal.³ Under this framework, sports are seen as having no educational purpose, rendering academic credit or formalized curricula in athletics unnecessary and unwarranted.³

Brand's work spurred a wave of op-eds,^{6,7,8,9,10,11} empirical, and conceptual research exploring the legitimacy of his conceptual framework and its practical implementation summarized within this document. Though Brand resisted the establishment of a major, his comparison with performing arts majors and the tenets of his proposed Integrated View seem to directly imply the notion of an academic major in intercollegiate athletics. By adopting innovative approaches such as creating athlete-focused courses and developing minors and majors in sport, colleges and universities can reposition competitive athletics to be part of the

academic curriculum and narrow the growing academic-athletic divide¹² by formally integrating athletics within the academy.

Lessons Learned Through College Sport Participation

College athletics is often touted as a training ground not just for sport, but for life itself.^{3,13,10,14} Athletes, coaches, administrators, and academicians alike celebrate the transformative power of sport, emphasizing the life skills and lessons fostered through participation such drive, resilience, teamwork, leadership, confidence, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence, just to name a few.^{10,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23} College athletes often have an edge in perseverance, teamwork, and achievement, qualities that set them apart in both their academic pursuits in college and future careers beyond sport.^{16,22,23,24} These skills, dispositions, and lessons are seen as tools for success far beyond the pools, tracks, courts, and fields of play which has been linked to post-collegiate marketability, job satisfaction, higher wages, faster career ascension, and significant overrepresentation of former athletes in C-suite executive positions.^{4,5,6,7,8,11,23,25} In this way, we should increasingly consider how sports and athletes' participation can—and in many ways already does—align closely with the broader missions of higher education to foster intellectual growth, instill personal and social responsibility, and prepare students for lifelong learning.^{3,9,16,17,26,27,28,29}

One approach to fostering academic-athletic integration is rooted in the principles of good practice in undergraduate education, including: (1) encouraging meaningful contact between students and faculty (as well as coaches and administrators),

(2) fostering reciprocity and cooperation among students (and athletes), (3) promoting active learning, (4) providing prompt feedback, (5) emphasizing effective time management, (6) setting high expectations, and (7) respecting diverse talents and learning styles.²⁸

Imagine a college or university environment where athletes are fully engaged in active learning both in the classroom and on the field, participate in ongoing dialogue with faculty, peers, and coaches, are guided by clear expectations and constructive feedback, and interact with a diverse range of individuals through sport and campus life.^{9,28,29,30,31,32}

For many athletes, this is already part of their experience—

I've learned time management, communication skills, working with people of different backgrounds/views/opinions/priorities etc., leadership, discipline, working with and respecting authority, learning to take criticism, dealing with failure, dealing with success, dealing with a physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding schedule, traveling with a large group of people (believe it or not you learn a lot of skills doing this so often), understanding your role in a community and seeing your purpose and how you can use your platform for good, learning how others tackle stress, success, failure in different ways, and knowing you always stay until the job is done. We know how to improve every day. We take each experience as a learning experience—always moving forward. We know not only how to lead, but also how to follow because that is just as important. We know listening skills, work ethic, motivation, and how to work and give 100% even when you're tired. Being a student-athlete has been the best and worst experience of my life at certain points, but there isn't anything else in the world that would make you as ready for the 'real world.'

—Power Four Football Athlete¹⁶

and it is a model that can be expanded and enhanced through a reimagined relationship between sport and education.^{9,12,33}

Consider the football athlete's quote above. For him—like many college athletes—the skills developed through athletics became the cornerstone of his future success. Drive, resilience, teamwork, and confidence are not mere buzzwords; they are lived experiences, cultivated through participation in high-level sports.^{22,34,22} His journey illustrates a broader truth: sport is a uniquely powerful educational platform, equipping individuals to navigate life's complexities like few other experiences can.^{3,16,17,33,36} Moreover, research and anecdotes from college athletes highlight how they learn to manage time, communicate effectively, and collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds—skills that are highly sought after by employers.^{20,21,22} In fact, executives across industries often prioritize hiring former college athletes, recognizing their mental toughness, goal orientation, and coachability.^{23,24}

Despite mounting evidence supporting the inherent educational value and marketability of the athlete experience, there remains untapped potential at the intersection of sport and higher education.³⁷ Despite the undeniable value of athletic experiences, athletes have limited opportunities to engage with these experiences in formalized educational settings.³ The challenge lies in bridging the education-sport gap—integrating the lessons learned through sport into structured educational opportunities that allow athletes to refine and expand their skills for future success. This evolving conversation represents a pivotal moment for college athletics. By examining how formal education and athletic participation intersect, we can unlock the potential for athletics to serve as a truly holistic educational experience.^{3,9,31} It's a powerful reminder that college sports, even at their most commercialized and professionalized levels, are not solely about competition; they are about education, personal growth, and preparing individuals for life well beyond the final lap, serve, down, or whistle.³⁴ Amid the ongoing transformation and restructuring of college sports, now is the ideal time to reclaim and refocus academic priorities through athletics.^{14,38}

Sport-Related and Sport-Adjacent Courses and Fields of Study

The conversation around integrating athletics into the academic mission of NCAA colleges and universities has sparked both innovation and debate.^{14,17,39} Central to this dialogue are three key areas: (1) athlete-centric or athlete-exclusive courses,^{15,39} (2) the prevalence of such courses programs across institutions,³⁹ (3) potential majors or minors in competitive sport, and (4) the perceptions surrounding the legitimacy and academic rigor of these courses and curricula.¹⁵ Together, these themes frame the possibilities for bridging the gap between athletic participation and academic excellence.

Design of Athlete-Centric Courses. A first-year college athlete stepping onto campus faces not only the typical challenges of university life—balancing newfound freedoms, responsibilities, and identity development—but also the intense pressures of elite athletic performance. To address these unique needs, many institutions offer specialized courses designed to support athletes in managing their dual roles.^{15,39} These classes often focus on life skills such as time management, study strategies, leadership development, and mental health, providing athletes with a structured framework to balance their athletic and academic obligations.³⁹

Prevalence of Athlete-Centric Courses Across Institutions. The availability of athlete-centric courses and sports-related programs varies widely across institutions. Division I and public universities are more likely to offer sports-related degrees such as kinesiology, sport management, and physical education,^{39,40} and courses designed for athletes (e.g., athlete 1st year collegiate onboarding courses or athlete leadership courses). Institutions in the West are significantly more likely to have an integrated approach and offer credit for athlete participation in sport (65.5%) compared to the Southeast (17.8%), which is the least integrated, Northeast (25.3%), or Midwest (36.4%).³⁹ Some universities embrace sports as a central component of their educational offerings, while others hesitate, reflecting broader tensions about the educational legitimacy of sport and the academic merit of athletes.^{39,40} These inconsistencies highlight the need for a more unified approach to the academic-athletic nexus, ensuring athletes everywhere have access to robust educational opportunities that align with their unique experiences and goals.

Potential Sport Majors and Minors. The possibilities for sport-related curricula extend beyond first-year seminars, leadership courses and transition/bridge programming. Some scholars have envisioned a more comprehensive model, one that draws inspiration from performance art majors like music or theater.^{9,15,17,18,19,27,28} Matz has extended Brand's analysis by articulating a potential sport performance/competitive sport major curriculum and its learning objectives and outcomes.^{17,18,19} This potential interdisciplinary, liberal-arts oriented performance major includes courses in sport psychology, coaching principles, exercise physiology, philosophy of sport, community service, sport analytics, group dynamics, and biomechanics, among others. Such a curriculum could allow athletes to deeply engage with their sport as both a practice and a field of study and legitimize the value of their educational experience as a formal academic degree.^{12,17,19,40} Example curricula are included at the end of this document.

Perceptions of Legitimacy and Rigor. The legitimacy of athlete-centric courses and sports-related programs is a topic of ongoing debate.^{3,14,16,41} Proponents of an integrated approach argue that these curricula respect the unique challenges faced by college athletes, offering them tools to transition smoothly into college life, apply lessons learned on the field, and engage meaningfully with their athletic experiences in academic contexts.

Critics raise concerns about potential drawbacks, including the risk of further dividing athletes and non-athletes or undermining the perceived rigor of an institution's academic programs.^{14,38,41} They argue that sport-centric curricula might devolve into "majors in eligibility," leading to sham courses and substandard educational practices. These criticisms reflect deeply entrenched biases inherent in the current Standard View of sport in

Perhaps when we embrace athletics as a true part of the academy and build an academic culture and organizational structure that values education through athletics, we can foster the collaboration and transparency that have never fully existed between athletics and the academy. When we can assist our students in the pursuit of their passion through legitimate academic structures, as we do in every other discipline, the shame in college sports will subside. By embracing the art and science of athletics, we may have no more athletic-academic scandals because athletics and academics will be one and the same. Let's take a first step by bridging the divide.

—Erianne Weight (2015)²⁴

higher education—a perspective rooted in the classist amateurism model upon which both European sport and the NCAA were established.^{9,41} These understandable concerns are further reinforced by the overwhelming time demands placed on athletes, which hinder their ability to fully realize their academic potential.^{10,16,17} These demands include extensive coast-to-coast conference travel, the pressure to maximize NIL opportunities within a limited timeframe, over 30 hours of weekly athletic training, and the requirement to maintain a full academic course load.

Integrating education and sport is far from simple, but it is an idea rooted in potential and progress. By reimagining the role of athletics within higher education, institutions have an opportunity to bridge two worlds that have long been treated as separate and conflicting.¹² This integration offers athletes not only a platform to excel in their sport but also a pathway to grow intellectually, professionally, and personally. In doing so, colleges and universities can reaffirm their commitment to the holistic development of all their students, ensuring that the lessons of the court are valued just as much as those of the classroom.

Recognizing College Sport Participation as Art and Science

Sport is a unique and multifaceted phenomenon that embodies both art and science, seamlessly blending creativity and precision, expression and analysis.⁹ Appreciating college sport participation as a form of art and science challenges (1) the historic undervaluation of athletics as an academic pursuit^{3,14,40} and (2) disrupts the dichotomy separating physical activity from intellectual inquiry and artistic cultural expression.^{3,33,34,40} As an art form, sport celebrates the beauty of human movement, the emotion of competition, and the narratives of triumph and adversity that captivate participants and spectators alike. Simultaneously, sport is grounded in science, utilizing principles of biomechanics, psychology, physiology, and data analytics to optimize performance, prevent injury, and unlock human potential. This duality positions sport as both a cultural and intellectual endeavor, offering a rich intersection of disciplines that highlights its significance in higher education and society. By exploring sport through the lenses of both art and science, we gain a deeper appreciation of its academic merit and power to inspire, educate, and connect individuals across diverse contexts.

If [intercollegiate athletics] is to be excluded from the curriculum as dissimilar to the performing arts, what is the nature of an 'art' that would exclude it? ... Athletic competition can be seen as a 'creative' activity when athletes are creative in making moves or devising strategies, moral values can be communicated through sport, such as sportspersonship and protest of social injustices, there is an aesthetic aspect to athletic movement, and athletic competition can elicit deep emotions and represent ideas about life lessons and morality tales about good and evil. On the other hand, performing arts like dance can be physically demanding, and there can be performing arts competitions.

—Lou Matz, Philosophy Professor, University of the Pacific¹⁷

College Sport as Art and a Liberal Art. Just as the performing arts celebrate human movement, emotion, and storytelling,^{9,34} college sports offer a similar display of mastery, strategy, and community engagement.^{15,16,17,34} Sport artistry lies not only in the skill and precision of athletes but also in team dynamics, improvisation, and the narrative arcs of

competition. Additionally, the artistry of sports extends beyond the athletes to include coaches as creators and educators.^{3,13,42,43,44,45} Coaching can be appreciated as an art form in its own right, requiring the ability to choreograph and manage team dynamics and cultivate the personal and athletic growth of individuals.^{13,43} Through creative problem-solving, mentorship, and emotional intelligence,⁴⁴ coaches play a pivotal role in shaping the artistry displayed on the field or court, connecting the technical and human elements of sport. Recognizing the aforementioned components of college sport as art reinforces the cultural and educational significance of sports, elevating them from mere entertainment to a legitimate human expression.^{9,15,34}

Like art, sports are intertwined with cultural identities.³⁴ Rituals within athletic performance—from pregame routines to the structured flow of gameplay—mirror the formalities of theatrical productions or musical performances.^{3,9,17,34} Scholars have noted that athletic events create a shared space where participants and spectators engage with emotions, aspirations, and values, much like an audience does with an artist or performer.^{3,34} This dynamic underscores how sports contribute to cultural cohesion and personal and collective identities. Furthermore, the aesthetic dimension of sports is undeniable. The perfectly executed basketball play, an innovative and explosive play in soccer, or the grace of a gymnast’s floor routine all demonstrate the physical and mental artistry of college athletes. These accomplishments encompass years of practice and discipline, comparable to the dedication seen in the performing arts.^{3,16} Scholars examining the aesthetics of sports have highlighted how these displays of skill engage audiences, evoking emotions and fostering appreciation for the artistry involved in athletic performance.^{3,16,17} This aesthetic appreciation strengthens the argument for viewing sports as an art form deserving of both cultural and academic recognition.

The art of sports is also evident in its ability to convey narratives. Athletes are actors/characters in sports’ “real life” dramas using their narrative power to add artistic layers to a game or match. Every sport event, season, or career tells a story, through conflict, character/athlete development, and resolution. These narratives are complete with themes of interpersonal connection, identity development, adversity, and/or triumph, resonating across stakeholders. This is not unlike the stories conveyed in literature, dance, music, and theater.³

Finally, Matz has argued that competitive sport is a form of a liberal art based on AAC&U’s framework of 21st century essential liberal learning outcomes.¹⁹ Competitive sports can develop emotional and social intelligences like intercultural understanding, leadership, teamwork, ethical action, and emotional self-control. They also can provide profound opportunities for greater self-awareness and self-knowledge, a long-standing goal of the liberal arts.

College Sport as Science. Just as scientific disciplines seek to understand and optimize the human body, mind, and behavior, college sports function as a living laboratory, integrating biomechanics, psychology, physiology, and systems thinking. Sport as science is evident not only in the precision and measurable outcomes of athletic performance but also in the ongoing experimentation, problem-solving, and innovation that underpin athletic success.⁴⁴

The scientific nature of sport extends beyond athletes to include coaches as practitioners of evidence-based strategies. Coaching embodies the scientific process: setting hypotheses, testing techniques, and refining methods to achieve optimal results. Coaches draw

on interdisciplinary knowledge from exercise physiology, sport psychology, and human performance to maximize the potential of their athletes.⁴⁴ Their work bridges the technical and human aspects of sport, fostering both individual growth and team success. Furthermore, collegiate coaches view themselves as educators even though our universities do not recognize them as such or reward them for this fundamental role that they play.¹³

Like science, sports are inherently experimental and data driven.^{46,47} Athletic training and competition rely on systematic methods of assessment and adjustment, much like scientific research. Athletes and coaches analyze data from wearable technologies, performance metrics, and recovery protocols to make informed decisions and minimize injury risks. Additionally, the application of technologies such as motion capture and artificial intelligence demonstrate the potential for sports to push the boundaries of scientific discovery and innovation. These advancements extend beyond athletics, contributing to broader fields like rehabilitation, prosthetics, and public health.

The experimental nature of sport also provides opportunities to study and enhance human potential. Athletic participation is a real-world context for developing critical life skills, such as resilience, teamwork, and decision-making under pressure.^{21,22} Each game or season functions as a case study in adaptability and performance optimization, offering rich insights for psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior.^{9,17,29} This interconnectedness reinforces the educational value of sport, moving it beyond physical competition to an intellectual and developmental experience.^{45,48}

Recognizing the scientific foundations of sport highlights its transformative potential within higher education and society. Reimagining college sport through an Integrated View—as both an art and a science—positions athletics as a powerful medium for advancing human knowledge and cultivating skills that extend far beyond the field or court.^{12,45,48} By embracing sport as an educational experience worthy of academic credit and curricular development, institutions can elevate its role as an essential part of academia and culture, fostering opportunities for innovative research, deeper cultural understanding, and a greater appreciation of athletic participation.

Relevant Issues for Future Discussion

The ongoing transformation of athletics within higher education presents several areas for further exploration and strategic development. First, the burgeoning field of e-sports as an academic discipline offers opportunities to study its integration into higher education and derive lessons from bridging entertainment and education in innovative ways. This includes understanding its potential to foster critical thinking, teamwork, and digital literacy in students.²⁷ Second, the credentialing of coaches as educators deserves critical attention, particularly as coaching increasingly involves pedagogical responsibilities that align with faculty roles, such as mentoring, leadership development, and facilitating student learning in both academic and athletic contexts.¹³ Addressing credentialing processes could enhance the recognition of coaching as an essential component of higher education's teaching mission. Additionally, robust methods to assess student learning outcomes associated with athletic participation raise important questions about academic rigor, fairness, and alignment with institutional goals.¹⁹ Developing reliable metrics to evaluate the educational value of athletic experiences can help validate the integration of sports into academia.²⁸ Finally, accreditation

requirements must evolve to reflect the unique contributions of athletic programs while maintaining rigorous academic standards. Accrediting bodies could provide frameworks that encourage the seamless integration of sports-related disciplines into broader institutional missions, ensuring that programs enhance both student development and educational quality.¹⁶ By addressing these issues, higher education can position athletics as a vital, innovative, and equitable part of its academic mission.

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Reimagining College Sport in an Era of Transformation:

Examples of sport-centric curricula within higher education

Stanford University Academic Credit for Athletic-Related Activities

Stanford University offers a foundational course for first-semester athletes (2 credits) in addition to the ability to earn credit for participating in varsity sport (1-2 credits per semester with up to 8 counting toward graduation).

- **ATHLETIC 1: Thriving in Athletics: Health and Wellness Concepts**
This 2-unit course develops the understanding, self-awareness, confidence, and skills necessary for students to serve as a resource for their peers in building resilience, promoting well-being, and supporting emotional balance.
- **ATHLETIC 10: Varsity Sport Experience**
Designed for varsity athletes, this course focuses on conditioning, practice, game preparation, and weight training. Students can earn 1-2 units per quarter, with a maximum of 8 activity units applicable toward graduation. Prerequisites include being a varsity athlete in the specific sport and obtaining permission from the appropriate sport administrator
- **ATHLETIC 11: Athletic Team Manager**
This 1-unit course is tailored for student managers of intercollegiate teams. Students can earn 1 credit per quarter, with up to 8 credits applicable toward graduation. Enrollment requires consent from the respective varsity team head coach.

https://22-23.bulletin.stanford.edu/departments/DAPER/courses?utm_source=chatgpt.com

David B. Falk College of Sport at Syracuse University

In coordination with the greater institution's academic strategic plan, Syracuse University is now one of the first Power Four institutions to establish a College of Sport. Formerly the David B. Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics will now be shortened to the David B. Falk College of Sport. The transformation of the college exemplifies how athletics can be integrated into the broader mission of postsecondary institutions. By treating sports as an interdisciplinary academic endeavor, Syracuse positions athletics as a medium for intellectual exploration, leadership development, and societal impact. This approach reflects higher education's role in fostering innovation and preparing students to address complex challenges in various fields and lifelong learning. As reimagined by Syracuse, athletics—across all competitive levels—is an avenue for life skills development (e.g., teamwork, critical thinking, resiliency, etc.) that transcend across industries and business sectors. The integration of athletics with technology, business, health, and more, signals its relevance beyond entertainment and competitive pursuits, but also as a platform for addressing grander social issues such as wellness, equity, and performance optimization. Through this model, Syracuse can strengthen the bridge between academic rigor and the real-world applications of sport, affirming sports' place within the mission of higher education.

<https://news.syr.edu/blog/2024/04/15/syracuse-university-to-transform-falk-college-into-first-of-its-kind-college-of-sport-launch-strategic-planning-to-advance-excellence-in-human-dynamics-programs/>

Methodist University PGA Golf Management (PGM) Program

Methodist University offers a comprehensive PGA Golf Management (PGM) program designed to prepare students for careers in the golf industry. This program is available as a concentration within Bachelor of Science degrees in Accounting, Business Administration, Financial Economics, or Marketing.

- **Curriculum:** The program includes courses such as Introduction to Golf Management, Facility Management, Teaching and Coaching, and Rules of Golf & Golf Technology. Students also participate in seminars and internships to gain practical experience.
- **Internships:** A total of 15 credit hours are dedicated to internships, providing hands-on experience in various aspects of golf management.
- **Facilities:** Students have access to the exclusive "Downback" Golf Course, an 18-hole private course with a practice facility that includes a short game area, putting green, bunkers, and 65 hitting stations. The Krick Teaching and Technology Center offers state-of-the-art golf technology and club fitting services.
- **PGA Membership:** While successful completion of the program does not automatically result in PGA membership, students are required to fulfill all membership requirements as they now exist or as they may be amended in the future to be eligible for PGA membership.

Kent State University's Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology Bachelor of Science

The Bachelor of Science degree in Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology provides students, athletes and those preparing for careers as coaches and sport practitioners with the knowledge of psychological theory and skills to enhance human behavior in the sport and exercise settings and the performing arts. This major explores social-psychological concepts such as motivation, self-confidence, anxiety or burnout, and how these concepts interact with the sport environment to influence athletes and performers.

Drake University's Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) Program

An interdisciplinary minor designed to cultivate ethical leadership skills among students from all academic disciplines. This 20-credit-hour program aims to empower students to make meaningful contributions to their communities through positive social change.

- **Interdisciplinary Approach:** The LEAD minor is open to all Drake students, regardless of their primary field of study, promoting a diverse learning environment.
- **Curriculum Structure:** The program combines theoretical knowledge with practical application, encompassing courses such as:
 - LEAD 001: Foundations of Leadership
 - LEAD 050: Leadership: Theory to Practice
 - LEAD 100: Leadership: Influence and Change
 - LEAD 190: Capstone Practicum with Reflection
- **Capstone Experience:** The LEAD 190 course offers an immersive practicum where students collaborate with community partners to implement change initiatives, fostering real-world leadership experience.

- Elective Opportunities: Students can choose electives that align with their interests, including options in ethics, global perspectives, and leadership development.

By completing the LEAD minor, students develop the confidence, competence, and character necessary to lead effectively in various settings, preparing them to address societal challenges and drive positive change. While the LEAD program is accessible to all students, including student-athletes, Drake Athletics has developed additional leadership initiatives tailored specifically for its student-athletes. These programs aim to foster excellence, ethics, and leadership within the athletic community. One such initiative is "The Bulldog Way," a program that emphasizes integrity, commitment to excellence, and leadership development. All first-year student-athletes participate in "Bulldog Foundations," which introduces them to these core values and essential skills for success at Drake.

https://godrakebulldogs.com/news/2015/1/13/the_bulldog_way_building_leaders.aspx

High Performance Coaching Specialization at the University of Florida (sub-component to the Sport Management M.S. degree)

The University of Florida's online M.S. in Sport Management with a specialization in High Performance Coaching (HPC) prepares students and future/current practitioners to support athletes in striving for peak performance across high school, college, and professional levels of sport competition. Designed for current coaches and those pursuing careers in coaching or sport administration, the HPC specialization prepares enrollees for myriad positions such as head/assistant coach, strength and conditioning coach, or sport administrator. The HPC specialization is nine credit hours of coursework—in addition to the master's degree—honing in on psychological, social, and managerial aspects of performance evaluation and development. Through courses focused on culture creation, team dynamics, character building, and ethics, students gain theoretical and practical skills to assess athlete abilities, create programming, and apply sport management principles to team development and management. Additionally, other institutions offer bachelor's degrees in coaching including Liberty University, University of Northern Colorado, Oklahoma State University, and University of Central Florida.

<https://sm.hhp.ufl.edu/specializations/high-performance-coaching/>

The University of South Carolina Course: "The Student-Athlete Experience"

As part of its Sport and Entertainment Management curriculum, USC offers SPTE 101, a 3-credit course that examines the functions and resources the university provides for students transitioning to college, focusing on challenges common to the first-year student-athlete experience. SPTE 101 is offered throughout the academic year, accommodating the schedules of incoming student-athletes and other interested students.

- Comprehensive Coverage: The course addresses a wide range of topics pertinent to student-athletes, including sexual violence prevention, healthy relationships, substance use, medical issues, mental health, gender equity, social media, financial responsibility, and current topics in college athletics such as Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) rights and the House case.
- Expert Instruction: Instruction is primarily delivered by guest speakers who are subject matter experts, providing students with diverse perspectives and insights.

- Integrated Learning: The course structure allows for more integrated learning on critical topics, moving beyond traditional all-day athletics department orientation sessions. This approach aims to enhance engagement and retention of important information.
- Accessibility: While the course is open to all students, it is a requirement for incoming freshmen and transfer student-athletes, ensuring they receive foundational knowledge essential for their academic and athletic success.

<https://academicbulletins.sc.edu/undergraduate/course-descriptions/spte/>

University of Delaware Proposed Sport Performance Analytics and Performance Nutrition Programs

Building on the success of the University of Delaware’s award-winning [BLUE program](#), (a traditional not-for-credit leadership program for athletes aside from a 1-2 credit first-year experience course), a Sport Performance Analytics major and Performance Nutrition minor are being presented to the faculty board for a fall 2025 launch.

Esports Educational Programs:

University of California, Irvine (UCI) was among the first public universities to establish an official esports program. They offer scholarships to esports athletes and have developed a comprehensive esports infrastructure, including a dedicated arena. While UCI does not offer a specific esports major, they provide courses related to gaming and esports within their Computer Game Science program. Shenandoah University offers an undergraduate degree in Esports Management and fields esports teams, integrating the academic and athletic aspects of esports. Becker College offers a Bachelor of Science in Esports Management, focusing on the business aspects of the esports industry. The college also supports competitive esports teams, providing students with practical experience alongside their academic studies.

Potential Major/Minor Model:

Building on a foundation of research, Lou Matz and Erienne Weight have proposed potential models for a sport performance major or minor. These programs could prepare students to work in various fields in national and international sports industries, especially for the student who doesn’t quite know what specific area but knows they are interested in sports-related work. The first model is explained in *Sports Major: Competitive performance as a liberal art*¹⁹ Majors must complete all of the core courses below plus a concentration. Eligible students are those who completed three years of a NJCAA, NCAA, NAIA sport, a highly organized club sport (with a coach, regular practice, and intercollegiate schedule) or an equivalent.

Courses	# of Units
Intercollegiate, club, or equivalent competitive sport (3 years)	3
Program orientation (hybrid delivery)	1
Principles of Exercise Physiology	4
Nutrition and Metabolism	4
Introduction to Probability & Statistics: Sport Analytics	4
Sport Psychology	4

Philosophy of Sport	4
Managing Sport Enterprises	4
Principles of Coaching	4
Capstone	2
2-3 courses in concentration*	8-12
Total Units	42-46

* Concentrations in areas such as strength & conditioning, business management, data science, coaching.

The second model, proposed by Erienne Weight,⁴⁹ provides options for a major or minor for collegiate athletes and all other students who are interested in studying how to maximize their performance by pairing interdisciplinary science and liberal art with their chosen passion that may not fit within current curricular pathways. This program could provide additional training for those interested in maximizing their performance within high-stress environments, e.g., medicine, entrepreneurship, finance, music, etc.

Peak Performance Major		Peak Performance Minor	
Classes	Credits		Credits
Core Courses: (7)		Core Course:	
The Art & Science of Expertise	3	The Art & Science of Expertise	3
Leadership & Group Dynamics	3+	Electives: (Select 3)	
Performance Psychology & Neuroscience	3+	Leadership & Group Dynamics + Professional Development Experience (PDE)	3+1
Performance Data Analytics	3+	Performance Psychology + PDE	3+1
Creativity, Innovation & Entrepreneurship	3+	Performance Data Analytics + PDE	3+1
Performance Physiology	3+	Creativity & Innovation + PDE	3+1
Communication & Media	3+	Performance Physiology + PDE	3+1
Professional Development Experiences (PDE): Learning outcome-driven guided instruction and training in passion-specific setting (for athletes: sport performance, weight training, data-analytics, film, strategy, nutrition, internship, etc.)	6-24 Minimum of 6 credits, with option of up to 3 credits per semester	Any additional course/elective from the major	3+1
Electives: (Athlete Track - Select 3)		Total Minor Credits	15
Personal Branding & Finance (NIL)	3	General Education Courses	30-40
Data Visualization	3	Major(s) Courses	65
Coaching	3	Bachelor of Science Credits	120
Sport History	3		
Sport Sociology	3		
Sport Strategy	3		
Nutrition	3		
Emergency First Aid	3		
Exercise Programming	3		
Total Major Credits	36-54		
General education courses	30-40		
Second major courses	54-26		
Bachelor of Science Credits	120		