Alumni Contributions to Academics: The Role of Intercollegiate Sports and NCAA Sanctions


This study uses a contribution function to analyze the impact of intercollegiate athletics on alumni donations. Time series data from Mississippi State University (MSU) for the years 1962-1991 are used in order to observe the changes in alumni giving with varying levels of athletic success. In addition to providing institutional statistics such as enrollment levels and the size of the alumni base, this data set also provides information about how an institution’s alumni donations are affected by an NCAA sanction. The NCAA placed MSU’s football program on probation during the 1970’s when an athletic booster provided discounted merchandise to an athlete. An OLS regression was run using the model below. Results show that the winning percentage for a basketball program and an institution overall are positively related to alumni giving. For baseball and an institution as a whole television exposure has a positive effect on alumni contributions. The sanction variable shows a negative correlation with the level of support from alumni. In addition, the level of state funding is negatively correlated with alumni giving, whereas the population of potential donors is positively correlated. Overall, successful athletic programs promote funding by alumni, and thereby, benefit the institution as a whole.

Data/Model

\[ Contributions_t = \alpha + \beta_1\text{Alumni Base}_t + \beta_2\text{Enrollment}_t + \beta_3\text{Appropriations}_t + \beta_4\text{Income}_t + \beta_5\text{Winning}_t + \beta_6\text{Post Season}_t + \beta_7\text{Television}_t + \beta_8\text{Sanctions}_t + \varepsilon_t \]

\( t \): Fiscal year 1962-1991

Variable and Expected Sign

Dependent Variable

Contributions: Annual alumni contributions to development foundation in real thousands of dollars (1982).

Independent Variables

Alumni Base (+): Cumulative number of degrees granted during previous 50-year period.
Enrollment (+): Total university student headcount for the fall academic semester.
Appropriations (-): Annual level of funding provided by the state in real dollars (1982).
Winning % (+): Total games won/total games played during season.
Post Season (+): Dummy Variable - Team invited to post season bowl or tournament = 1; otherwise = 0.
Television (+): Annual number of games broadcast on television.
Sanctions (-): Dummy Variable - NCAA sanctions imposed for rules violation = 1; otherwise = 0.

Data Source

MSU Development Foundation, MSU Office of Institutional Research, and MSU Dept. of Intercollegiate Athletics. Proprietary and public domain data.