Fourth Down and Gold to Go? Assessing the Link between Athletics and Alumni Giving


This article studies the conditions that affect alumni giving. The objective is to determine how alumni donations are affected by successful intercollegiate football and men’s basketball programs. Data collected from the Council for Aid to Education, the NCAA, and *Peterson’s Guide to Four-Year Colleges* for the years 1973-1990 are used; data sets are constructed for private universities, public universities and liberal arts colleges. Variables that are considered include those that indicate something about the institution’s students, the institution itself, and athletic success. The results show that for private and public universities, a bowl game appearance in football increases gift totals. For public universities, an appearance in the NCAA basketball tournament correlates with higher alumni gift totals. For liberal arts colleges, there is a small positive correlation between success in football and higher giving levels. Although the resulting coefficient for basketball success is insignificant for liberal arts colleges, the last four years of the sample period show a significant positive relationship. Overall, colleges and universities with successful sports programs generally receive more alumni gifts.

Data/Model:

\[
\log(G_{it}) = a + b\log(W_{it}) + c\log(X_{it}) + d\log(Y_{it}) + s_t \log(Z_{it}) + \varepsilon_{it}
\]

Variables

- **YR82-86, 88-89:** Years 1982-1986 and years 1988-1989
- **YR87:** 1987
- **YR90:** 1990
- **% women:** the percentage of the student population that is female
- **% minority:** the percentage of the student population that is of a minority group
- **% on financial aid:** the percentage of an institution’s money that is spent on financial aid
% accepted: the percentage of applicants who are accepted

Real tuition: tuition level in dollars for an institution

Real expenditures/student: the amount of money spent on each student by the institution

Age: age of the institution

Enrollment: enrollment levels of the institution

Football win %: the winning percentage of the institution’s football program

Basketball win % (all years): the winning percentage of the institution’s basketball program for all years considered

Basketball win % (1987-90): the winning percentage of the institution’s basketball program for the years 1987-1990

G: total gift per alum for institution $i$ in year $t$

W: characteristics of the institution

Y: the effort the institution makes to solicit alumni giving

Z: the success of the school’s football and men’s basketball teams

Data Sources


