

THE SCHOLARSHIP DIVIDE

# It's Not an Adventure, It's a Job

By [BILL PENNINGTON](#)  
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A few months into her first year at Villanova, Stephanie Campbell was despondent.

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Tim Shaffer for The New York Times

Stephanie Campbell received a \$19,000 athletic scholarship to play field hockey at Villanova, but she said the demands of the sport and her schoolwork left her little time for a social life.

## The Scholarship Divide

*These articles are exploring the chase for N.C.A.A. scholarships, the scarcity of athletic aid, and the*

As a high school senior in New Jersey, she had been thrilled to receive a \$19,000 athletic scholarship to play field hockey at [Villanova University](#), a select, private institution outside Philadelphia. But she had not counted on the 7 a.m. start of every class day, something required so she could be in the locker room by noon to prepare for a four-hour shift of afternoon practices and weight-lifting sessions. Travel to games forced her to miss exams and classes. There were also mandatory team meetings, study halls and weekend practices.

She was overwhelmed.

“Plus, her roommate had a typical college student’s social life, while Stephanie was in her room on weekend nights trying to sleep because she had a game the next day,” her mother, Kathleen Campbell, said last month. “She came home crying.”

So Kathleen Campbell sat her daughter down, waited for a break in the sobs and said: “Villanova costs more than \$40,000 a year to attend. They’re paying you \$19,000 to play field hockey. At your age, there is no one out there anywhere who is going to pay you that kind of money to do

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## *challenges facing coaches and scholarship athletes.*

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Tim Shaffer for The New York Times

anything. And that's how you have to look at this: It's a job, but it's a great job."

Campbell, 22, kept at it all four years, serving as a team captain last fall while majoring in marketing. She is expected to graduate this spring.

"I'm missing the sport terribly already," she said last month. "But it was a ton of work. Receiving an athletic scholarship is a wonderful thing, but most of us only know what we're getting, not what we're getting into."

Dozens of scholarship athletes at [N.C.A.A.](#) Division I institutions said in interviews that they had underestimated how taxing and hectic their lives would be playing college sports. They also said others share a common misperception that athletes lead a privileged existence.

"You know, maybe if you're a scholarship football player at Oklahoma, everything is taken care of for you," Tim Poydenis, a scholarship baseball player at Villanova, said. "But most of us are nonrevenue-sport athletes who have to do our own fund-raising just to pay for basics like sweat pants and batting gloves. We miss all these classes, which obviously doesn't help us or make our professors happy. We give up almost all our free time. Our social life is stripped bare.

"Friday happy hour or spring break? Forget it. I haven't had a spring break since I was a sophomore in high school."

The athletes were interviewed over several weeks from a cross section of sports at two representative Division I institutions, Villanova, a charter member of the Big East Conference, and the [University of Delaware](#), a state-run institution that is a member of the Colonial Athletic Association. None of the athletes asked for or expected sympathy. They know there are many overscheduled college students who devote extra hours to academic and extracurricular activities or part-time jobs and internships.



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Many college athletes, like Elvis Lewis, who runs track at Villanova, start their classes early in the morning to accommodate training and game schedules. For events away from campus, teams can leave at 1 p.m. and not return until 10 p.m.

“We love what we do, and it is worth it,” Poydenis said.  
“But everybody thinks every college athlete is on a pampered full ride. The truth is a lot of us are getting \$4,000 and working our butts off for it.”

The life of the scholarship athlete is so arduous that coaches and athletes said it was not unusual for as many as 15 percent of those receiving athletic aid to quit sports and turn down the scholarship money after a year or two.

“I came in with 10 recruited girls,” Stephanie Campbell said. “There are four of us left as seniors. Not everyone was on scholarship, but maybe half who left were getting money.”

Campbell said she had a teammate who wanted to be an engineer but that the classes and off-campus projects in that major clashed with field hockey practices and trips.

Katie Lee, a senior softball player at Delaware, said at least one scholarship player had quit the team in each of her seasons. Of her former teammates, she said, “I see them around campus, and they look happy.”

Emily Schaknowski, a sophomore lacrosse player on athletic scholarship at Delaware, said 5 of the 12 women she entered with were no longer on the team. Most had relinquished their scholarships.

Joe Taylor, a junior soccer player at Villanova, said he was one of four left from a freshman recruiting class of 10.

“You wonder if you should try to talk them out of it,” Taylor said. “But for most of those guys, it probably is the best decision to walk away.”

At Villanova, Poydenis said he thought the defections resulted from the shock that set in after a youth sports culture ethos collided with the realities of college athletics.

*Griffin Palmer contributed reporting.*

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