

## **Must reading for all college big-money sports fans: “[Welcome to the Big-Time College-Sports Sausage Factory](#).”**

[If you think USM](#) and [other colleges’ sports](#) programs are different, you’re naïve.

### [“Welcome to the Big-Time College-Sports Sausage Factory](#)

At midafternoon on Wednesday, on a day that had dawned crisp and clear, with fall clearly in the air, Carol L. Folt, chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, spoke to the press. Her comments seemed to personify a sense of resignation at the release of the long-anticipated [Wainstein Report](#), which found that the department of African and Afro-American studies had created no-show classes to

help athletes remain eligible to play: “I think it’s very clear that this is an academic, an athletic, and a university problem ... It was such a shock that it was hard for people to fathom.”

Interestingly, Ms. Folt neither identified the problem nor offered a reason it is such a shock. As college-sports scholars who have spent most, if not all, of our academic careers studying what has become known as the “[collegiate model of intercollegiate athletics](#),” we view the academic fraud outlined in the Wainstein Report as (1) not shocking and (2) the logical and expected result of an inherently corrupt and immoral NCAA Division I collegiate model.

While astonished by the scale of academic fraud that occurred at UNC, we are not surprised that one of America’s most prestigious public universities would be embroiled in this type of scandal. The actions in the academic department that offered the no-show courses, which the report calls “paper classes,” did not occur in a vacuum. Tellingly, the scandal could not have continued for years if not for an equally invested athletic department that fueled the fraud.

The philosophy underlying UNC’s approach to the business of college sports is not unique in higher education. To varying degrees, academic fraud has occurred, is occurring, and will continue to occur on college campuses across the United States because such schemes are a logical outgrowth of the tension between athletics and (insert university’s name) educational mission.

Previous academic scandals, too numerous to recount, have occurred over the years. While each scandal has its own news-cycle half-life, each produces a similar narrative:

- Academic fraud of some sort or another occurs over a period of time.
- A group of rogue individuals (the number may vary slightly) who have “crossed the line” and broken the rules is identified, vilified, and punished. Sometimes perpetrators leave in shame but often with a contract buyout.
- After punishing those individuals for not following the rules, university administrators issue a statement promising that reforms have been or will be made to deal with the problem.
- A solemn proclamation is issued that the problem has been solved and the academic/athletic balance restored, as noted in Chancellor Folt’s statement: “Our core mission as an institution is academics. I believe we can also offer strong and successful athletics programs, and that in fact athletics advances our academic mission.”

There's just one glaring omission in the narratives constructed by university administrations and the National Collegiate Athletic Association: The real problem is never identified.

The real problem is not the NCAA's national office, or "underprepared student-athletes from difficult backgrounds," or tutors who realize that some players just could not write their own papers. The fundamental problem is boards of trustees, university presidents, athletic directors, and conference commissioners who, far too often, prop up and defend a big-time college-sports enterprise that offers false academic hope to specially admitted athletes by pretending the athletes are just like every other student on the campus, while also turning a blind eye to the harmful, though predictable, effects of supposed academic reforms, including the graduation-success rate and academic-progress rate.

Fundamentally, the paper-class scheme at UNC was designed to accomplish two things: (1) keep players eligible by increasing their GPAs and (2) provide players with a mechanism to make progress toward a degree. Everyone involved knew the system within which they were operating was a sham.

While the stated tax-exempt purpose of big-time college sports is education, we all know it is about entertainment and money. The real problem is that, as the days pass and this latest scandal fades, coaches, players, tutors, and administrators will most likely go back to business as usual, and college-sports fans across the country will tune in to [ESPN's College GameDay](#) and savor the sweet smell and taste of their big-time college-sports sausage, all the while ignoring the discarded athletes, as well as higher education's integrity, that have been ground up in the process.

Having gone through yet another public flogging, following a script developed over decades, everyone involved can continue to deny how completely big-time college sports has corrupted the mission of higher education. To do otherwise would be to acknowledge that the "opportunity for an education" touted as the basis for the entire enterprise is the real fraud used to justify an economically exploitative entertainment system.

The academic fraud at UNC was a calculated cost of doing business, one that every institution with a big-time athletic program pays in one way or another. Some get caught breaking the rules; some don't. And sometimes, it takes six investigations, a whistle-blower, and unrelenting public pressure to unearth the truth from a societal entity whose fundamental role in a democratic society is the preservation of the same.

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