



RESEARCH BRIEF

Athletic Scholarship Awards at Community Colleges

Community College Executive Forum

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Institutional operating budgets fund athletic programs at all profiled institutions. Three of four profiled institutions also use institutional operating budget funds to fund athletic scholarships. The athletic program at **Institution D** collects student fees to help fund athletic scholarships, pay game officials, and fund athletes' travel expenses. **Institution C, Institution A, and Institution B** do not collect student fees to fund athletic programs.

Athletic scholarship size at profiled institutions varies by size of athletic budgets and distribution of scholarship funds across athletic teams. At **Institution A**, the athletic director allocates all coaches the same amount of money each semester to divide among their players. Players typically receive between \$100 and \$200 and free housing as a part of their athletic scholarships. The average value of athletic scholarships at **Institution D, Institution C, and Institution B** ranges from \$800 to \$2,000, but do not include free housing. The athletic director at Institution D divides scholarship money among teams based on the competitiveness of the sport (e.g., how many peer institutions offer the sport, conference competitiveness). At Institution C and Institution B, teams receive scholarship money based on team size.

At all profiled institutions, coaches determine scholarship size and allocation among their players. Athletic directors oversee the selection and approval process. Contacts at profiled institutions report that coaches are best positioned to award athletic scholarships because coaches work directly with the athletes and understand team recruiting needs better than other administrators. Athletic directors at profiled institutions maintain authority to override coach decisions, but rarely do so.

Coaches award athletic scholarships to recruit and retain student athletes. To recruit out-of-state and long-distance students who might not otherwise attend the institution, **Institution A** includes free housing in its athletic scholarships. Similarly, **Institution C** grants each coach six tuition waivers to recruit out-of-state athletes. Some coaches at **Institution D** and **Institution B** distribute scholarships evenly across all players to encourage team unity and retention. Other coaches grant larger athletic scholarships to the two or three highest performing players to attract other star athletes. Contacts at Institution B also award athletic scholarships to improve team morale, make college affordable, and reward players who maintain high GPAs.

2) Funding Athletic Programs and Scholarships

Athletic Scholarship Funding

Athletic Programs Receive Funding from Operating Budgets, Ticket Sales, and Student Fees

Athletic programs at all profiled institutions receive central budget funds. **Institution C**, **Institution A**, and **Institution D** sell tickets to their athletic events to augment their budgets. The funding models at all profiled institutions have not changed in recent years, and contacts do not expect them to change in the future.

Finance Athletic Scholarships through the Athletic Budget

Institution A, **Institution B**, and **Institution C** fund their athletic scholarships through institutional operating budgets. **Institution D** funds its athletic scholarships exclusively through student fees. Athletes at Institution C, Institution B, and Institution D may earn externally-funded athletic scholarships (i.e., scholarships funded by third-parties outside of the institution). Athletic department leaders at Institution A are developing a booster club to initiate external fundraising.

No profiled institution offers athletic scholarships that cover the full cost of tuition. Average athletic scholarship size varies based on total budget and allocation across teams.

Athletic directors at contact institutions report that internal scholarships are more common than external scholarships.



Athletic Scholarships at Profiled Institutions

Contacts at **Institution A** report that athletes receive significantly less scholarship money than students at peer institutions. While Institution A's athletic teams typically finish in the bottom third, the athletic program typically receives over \$100,000 in profits.

Institution A

The average athletic scholarship is between \$100 and \$200; no player receives more than \$600. The athletic department budget is about \$560,000 a year and athletic directors provide coaches \$4,200 per semester to divide among their players. All non-walk-on athletes also receive free housing as part of their athletic scholarships. Athletes occupy one-third of the dorms on campus but only 10 percent of the population, which makes free housing an easy incentive for coaches to provide.

Institution D

The average value of athletic scholarships is \$1,000. The total scholarship funding pool is \$180,000 for 13 sports and more than 200 athletes. The athletic director divides scholarship money among sports teams based on the competitiveness of the sport (e.g., how many peer institutions offer the sport, conference competitiveness). Coaches decide how to allocate the scholarship money. Fewer than half of all athletes receive athletic scholarships.

Institution C

The average athletic scholarship is \$2,000. Teams receive scholarship money based on team size. Coaches use their budgets to pay for travel costs, operating costs, and to award scholarships as they see fit. Contacts report that some players receive other non-athletic scholarships and therefore do not require as much institutional athletic scholarship money.

Institution B

The average value of athletic scholarships is \$800. The executive director of student life and athletics divides scholarship funds among coaches based on team size. She allocates similar amounts of scholarship funds to all men's and women's teams that are the same size.

3) Administrative Process for Awarding Scholarships

Decision Making Process for Awarding Athletic Scholarships

To remain eligible for athletic scholarships at the **Institution B**, student athletes must maintain a 2.0 average GPA and pass at least 66 percent of their classes.

Empower Coaches to Award Athletic Scholarships with Oversight from Athletic Directors

At all profiled institutions, coaches select which students receive athletic scholarships. Athletic directors approve scholarship award decisions and ensure coaches do not go over budget. Athletic directors at profiled institutions rarely contradict coaches' decisions about awarding athletic scholarships. At **Institution A**, the athletic director researches all prospective athletes online to check their athletic and academic records. When the athletic director discovers a player who is ineligible in an association outside of the NJCAA, he works with the coach to ensure the player is eligible to play in the NJCAA before the institution awards the scholarship.

Because coaches are the only administrators who work directly with athletes, they are most familiar with team-specific recruiting needs each year. Athletic directors at contact institutions trust coaches to determine the most effective way to divide scholarships among their players. Contacts report that coaches often take different approaches to scholarship awards depending on their sport and team size. Some coaches distribute scholarships equally among all players to encourage team unity, while others award scholarships only to their highest performing athletes to make their teams more competitive.

Award Scholarships to Recruit and Retain Athletes

Coaches at profiled institutions often award athletic scholarships to make college more affordable for their athletes, reward students for maintaining high GPAs, and improve team morale. Although most athletes at **Institution A** only receive between \$100 and \$200, the free housing incentive enables coaches to recruit out-of-state and long-distance students who likely would not have attended the institution otherwise. Additionally, because athletes occupy on-campus housing that would otherwise be empty, the institution benefits from recruiting athletes who can fill the dorms and pay out-of-state tuition. At **Institution D**, some coaches award scholarships to all their players to reward players for their hard work and encourage them to return the following year. Other coaches cannot give scholarships to all players due to the large size of their teams, and instead provide scholarships to the top players in an effort to attract other high-performing athletes to attend the institution.

Contacts at **Institution D** report that scholarships are not the primary reason student athletes attend. Instead, athletes are more enticed by the college's facilities, coaches, academic reputation, and the opportunity to transfer to a four year school for athletics.

At **Institution C**, coaches often award athletic scholarships to players who do not receive other scholarships and have a greater need for the money. These scholarships help recruit and retain students who require financial aid to attend college. Additionally, each coach at Institution C receives six out-of-state tuition waivers to recruit out-of-state student athletes. Contacts at **Institution B** report that if athletes feel connected to the campus, the coaches, and their teams, they are more likely to persist.

Reasons Coaches Award Athletic Scholarships



Recruit Star Players

Coaches may award their highest performing players with large scholarships to attract and recruit other athletes to their institutions.



Make College Affordable

Athletic scholarships help students afford college and make two-year institutions more attractive to prospective student athletes.



Appeal to Athletes' Status

Contacts report that student athletes are more likely to attend a two-year institution when they can say they are going to college "on a scholarship."



Improve Team Morale

Awarding players with scholarships boosts team morale and players' sense of community, which may improve student athlete retention.



Increase Team GPA and Retention

Coaches may award athletic scholarships to players with the highest GPAs on the team to encourage athletes to focus on academics and pass their classes to return the following year.

Guidelines for Awarding Scholarships

Institute an Approval Process to Ensure Athletic Director and Financial Aid Office Receive Required Information

At **Institution B** and at **Institution A**, athletes must sign letters of intent (LOIs) (i.e., agreements between athletes and the institution about the scholarship) before accepting their scholarships. Additionally, coaches at Institution A complete an LOI checklist for each athlete detailing the amount players will receive. Coaches submit checklists to the athletic director for approval.

After the athletes and athletic directors sign the LOI at Institution B, the assistant to the executive director sends the paperwork to the financial aid office for approval.

Items Included on LOI Checklist at *Institution A*

Sport

Athlete Name

Checkmark that Student Application is Complete

Checkmark that Student FAFSA is Complete



Scholarship Amount

Dorm Scholarship

Athletic Scholarship

Scholarship Allotment Remaining

Coach Certification Signature

Scholarship Award Process at Institution B



Athletes and the **executive director of athletics** sign letters of intent.



Executive director of athletics and the **assistant to executive director** ensure all coaches stay within the budget and approve the athletes.



Assistant to executive director of athletics sends paperwork to the **financial aid office** for final approval.



Financial aid office approves and awards athletic scholarships.

Contacts at Profiled Institutions Report Satisfaction with Athletic Scholarship Award Process

Athletic directors report that coaches are the best individuals at the institutions to recruit athletes and to determine the value of athletic scholarships. Athletic directors review scholarship allocation and maintain authority to override coach decisions, though they rarely do so. Contacts at all profiled institution believe this is the most effective process to award athletic scholarships and do not believe the process will change in the future.

4) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- How do institutions fund their athletic programs?
- Have athletic funding models changed or evolved in recent years?
- How do institutions fund their athletic scholarships?
- Is there a percentage of athletic tuition reserved to support the athletic scholarships?
- Are ticket sales used to fund scholarships and/or the athletic division?
- What is the breakdown between institutionally funded and externally funded scholarships?
- Who is involved in the process of selecting which athletes are awarded scholarships?
- Who decides the size of the scholarships?
- Who awards the scholarships to the athletes?
- Do institutions have written guidelines for awarding athletic scholarships?
- How long have institutions maintained their process of awarding and funding athletic scholarships?
- Do institutional leaders find their process effective? Will institutions change their process in the near future?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- The Chronicle of Higher Education (<http://chronicle.com>)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)

The Forum interviewed athletic directors at profiled institutions.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Institutional Enrollment	Classification
Institution A	South	4,000	Associate's Colleges: High Career & Technical-High Traditional
Institution B	Mid-Atlantic	8,500	Associate's Colleges: High Transfer-High Traditional
Institution C	South	5,000	Associate's Colleges: High Transfer-High Traditional
Institution D	Mid-Atlantic	7,000	Associate's Colleges: High Transfer-High Traditional