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Writing Process

To begin this research paper, I scanned the list of possible topics that Dr. Biswas handed out in class. The topic that intrigued me most was college cheating scandals. However, I wanted to find one to specifically write about, rather than discuss cheating in college at large. After some searching, I came across the ongoing cheating scandal at The University of North Carolina involving their athletic programs. As an avid sports fanatic, I was interested. I did some basic reading on the case and decided to choose it as the focus of my paper. Throughout the writing process I read dozens of articles and investigations related to this case and wrote a few outlines. After having a full rough draft, it was peer-reviewed in class and then subsequently reviewed by Dr. Biswas. I then took all of these critiques into consideration and wrote a final draft. Other than a re-formatted works cited page, this is the final draft that I am submitting.

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Analysis of the UNC Paper Classes Scandal*

The University of North Carolina (UNC) is known as a prestigious college in both academics and athletics. Academically, it boasts a 26% admission rate with an average composite ACT score of just over 30 (“Class Profile”). Athletically, it has earned 47 team national championship titles and 46 individual titles (“Carolina”). But in the summer of 2011, that reputation was tarnished forever when questions were asked about two separate instances of football players and their academics. Over the course of the next several years, those two questions would grow into a full scale NCAA investigation of what were known as “paper classes” at UNC. The seriousness and complexity of what was uncovered required at least a dozen investigations and reports. This paper looks at the facts of the UNC case and offers the conclusion that the NCAA should severely punish the University of North Carolina for their academic dishonesty and blatant bending of NCAA rules and regulations.

This scandal and investigation has been going on for 6 years now. The NCAA has closed and reopened the investigation several times, each time unearthing more horrifying facts. Between the educational government in the state of North Carolina, UNC itself, and the NCAA, over a dozen reports and investigations have been written and done. The report written by a private firm at UNC’s request, the Wainstein Report, was done in 2014 and was one of the very last. It exceeds 100 pages and was written after a review of 10 previous reports and

investigations, along with its own investigation. The facts presented helped summarize and fully expose the extent of the wrongs committed.

Before looking any closer at the scandal itself, it is necessary to review the academic standards to which the NCAA holds athletes. In order to participate as a Division I athlete, the division of most UNC sports, one must complete a set of 16 core classes during high school, receiving a minimum GPA of 2.3 in those classes (“Play”). That correlates to about a C+ average in classes that almost every high school requires in order for a student to graduate. That is not asking a lot of athletes. When athletes reach college the standards are just as minimal. Athletes must earn 18 credit hours towards a degree at their university prior to each year of enrollment, receiving a 1.8-2.0 GPA in those courses, depending on how many years they have been in school (“Division I”). That is a minimum of a C average while taking three to four classes a semester. Again, not a lot is being asked. Furthermore, these standards are in place for a very important reason. College is a place of education where people come to earn a degree. Students pay thousands of dollars a year at UNC (\$24,898 for North Carolina residents and \$51,466 for out-of-state students) for a quality education (“Cost”). While it is most student-athletes’ dream to become a professional someday, according to NCAA.org, 3.55% of athletes in football, men’s and women’s basketball, baseball, men’s ice hockey, and men’s soccer become professionals (“Estimated”). These are the six main sports with major drafts and steady professional leagues. The 96.45% of athletes that are not drafted need a degree, something to show for their 4+ years spent in college that will help them support themselves and make a living. Even the 3.55% that do become pros will at some point in their lives need another method to make a living other than the money they earned through athletics. The average career length in the big 4 American leagues, the NFL, NBA, NHL, and MLB, is 4.4 years (Nelson). The NCAA does not require

athletes to meet these standards to make it harder for them to compete; they are requirements because the NCAA is thinking about the athletes' futures, something a lot of people fail to do.

In that tragic summer of 2011, questions were asked about the academics of a couple of UNC football players. One player, in 2007, received a B+ in a college 400-level bioethics class the summer before he even attended UNC, while another player had plagiarized a paper in the summer of 2009 (Wainstein et al. 24). The second instance did not raise as many questions as the first. Plagiarism is not unheard of throughout educational institutions. But a freshman student receiving a high grade in a senior level class he was not qualified for? That was bizarre. It took over three years for the full answer to that question to be uncovered.

In 1979, Debby Crowder was hired by UNC as a secretary in the Curriculum of African and Afro-American Studies (AFAM). She retired in 2009, holding almost the same exact position. In 1992, Julius Nyang'oro was appointed as the AFAM department chair. Nyang'oro was focused on the growth of the AFAM department, not what it was teaching. At the same time, Crowder cared and had empathy for underprivileged or underachieving students who struggled in their classes. This combination would lead to the creation of the afore mentioned "paper classes" (Wainstein et al.15). Nyang'oro gave Crowder responsibilities in line with a department head, like himself, and even let her sign his name on department paperwork. According to the Wainstein report, Crowder was eventually referred to as "Professor Debby" by students due to the abuse of these privileges vested in her by Nyang'oro (Wainstein et al. 16). Crowder was only qualified to be a secretary, her legal title, and had a bachelor's degree in English.

Using the power given to her, Crowder slowly formed the previously mentioned "paper classes". These were classes that required little or no attendance and just a paper or two over the entire semester, no more. The length and content of the papers did not matter much. Crowder

would quickly skim them and give out almost all As and Bs. She then signed for Nyang'oro, the instructor listed as teaching the class. Yet the Dean almost never taught a day in these classes. He sometimes never even knew which classes he supposedly taught (Wainstein et al. 17). According to the Wainstein Report, Nyang'oro may or may not have initially known the full extent of these classes, but when he did find out he “acquiesced in them by taking no action to put a halt to them” (Wainstein et al. 17).

On a purely numbers basis, there were 3,933 enrollments in these classes from 1999, the year a large number of these classes started happening, to 2011, two years after Crowder had left and the year Nyang'oro did. Almost half, 47.6%, were student-athletes and 24.5% were football or basketball players (Wainstein et al. 19). While this means many regular students were also taking advantage of these classes or genuinely liked the format, only 4% of enrolled students at UNC over this time were athletes and 0.6% football players, with a nominal number playing basketball (Wainstein et al. 19). This highlights the fact that Crowder and athletic counselors, or ASPSAs, consciously worked together to put athletes in these classes that were either lazy or unable and unqualified to handle the rigorous academics at UNC (Wainstein et al. 19). UNC was admitting students who were not fully capable and hiding it by faking the grades that they needed to hold a mere 2.0 GPA, the previously stated minimum GPA required by the NCAA to participate in college athletics.

As if these unbelievably easy classes were not enough, the student athletes were given further advantages. Tutors often wrote or heavily helped write the few papers that were assigned in the paper classes (Wainstein et al. 20). One tutor, Jennifer Wiley, states in the Wainstein Report that she “felt she had little choice but to cross the line and do some of their work for them” (20). Some people did raise questions. Around 2005, Dean Roberta Owen noticed the

unusually large number of “independent studies” (paper classes) in the AFAM department. She told her concerns to Nyang’oro, stating in the Wainstein report that he needed to ““get [Crowder] under control”” (Wainstein et al. 21). There was a drop in the total number of “independent studies” immediately afterwards. By this time, the mid-2000s, many faculty and students at the university knew about what was going on and said nothing. These fake classes were clearly giving the student athletes, mainly football and basketball players, at UNC an unfair advantage over their opponents at other schools. While they did not directly violate NCAA rules, they did help students unfairly earn degrees and meet NCAA academic standards that were required to participate in athletics.

A similar mode of cheating in college athletics involves the paying of players. College athletes are not allowed to be paid for their play like professional athletes. However, some schools have violated this rule and have been severely punished for it. The University of Southern California (USC) paid star running back and current NFL player Reggie Bush and his family, providing them cash and other gifts, during his time at USC. In 2010 the NCAA initially ruled that USC would lose 30 scholarships from 2011-2013, be on probation for 4 years, and have to vacate all wins from December 2004 through the 2005 season, including their BCS national championship, all for this violation (Hogan). These sanctions would later change slightly, but they were still drastic, some people even calling them “the toughest penalties since levying Southern Methodist with the ‘death penalty’ in 1986” (Hogan). Southern Methodist University (SMU), had their football program erased for a full year in 1986 for countless and varying violations (Whitford and Elkind). Bush was also forced to forfeit his Heisman trophy (Hogan). While this was a violation of NCAA rules, the payment of college athletes is a heavily debated topic. Many inside and outside of the situation believe some compensation from either

the schools or NCAA, organizations making billions of dollars off of the performances of the unpaid athletes, should be given to the players. But no one is arguing that student athletes should have easier grade requirements for eligibility or be able to take easier classes. Yet USC was left crushed by the NCAA for their violations while UNC, so far, received a punishment that pales in comparison.

This does not mean that UNC has not been punished at all. The football program has received and served a one-year postseason ban, had small scholarship reductions, and been put on probation (Patterson). However, that is it so far. While the final allegations and punishments have yet to be handed down, the NCAA has had over two years since the bulk of the case facts were discovered. Further punishments are needed, as has been explained and supported. Instead, UNC has continued to achieve great heights in athletics. During the years of violation, the men's basketball team won national championships in 2005 and 2009. Men's soccer won one in 2011, while the women's team won several. In all, since 1999, the beginning of the widespread paper classes, UNC has won 17 team national athletic championships to date ("Carolina"). The NCAA, if they want to uphold their credibility in the eyes of sports fans and the general public, must hand down severe overall punishments.

It is now up to the NCAA to end this complex investigation by hitting UNC with stern punishments. Whether it is large scholarship reductions, permanent probation, the loss of titles and wins, or something more, something must be done to make an example of this terrible situation. Hundreds of student athletes have been exploited by the University of North Carolina in order to help the university achieve athletic success. These students have been cheated out of a full education and lied to. The NCAA has academic regulations in place for a reason: because college is first and foremost a place of learning and education that prepares people for work and

life after graduation. If students are not being fully prepared for this first, then athletics must be halted until the students are prepared. Getting around these rules so that students can compete athletically or even just to improve their athletic achievement is unethical and must be stopped, especially after such a continued and blatant example.

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