



# William Rudelius

Rein in college athletics to get student athletes back to classrooms, protect their health, enrich their lives, reduce tuition for all students

A Minnesota Public-Policy Interview

*October 25, 2019*

William (Bill) Rudelius, professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota, discusses two topics: (1) the lack of focus on undergraduate education at large public universities, using the University of Minnesota as an example; and (2) the impact of athletic programs at large public universities. Following his Civic Caucus interview, Rudelius completed a paper on college athletics in February 2020. The paper follows the interview notes below.

## Present

John Cairns (vice chair), Janis Clay (executive director), Pat Davies, Paul Gilje, Lee Munnich, Paul Ostrow (chair), Bill Rudelius, Dana Schroeder (associate director), Walt Seibert, Clarence Shallbetter.

## Summary

William Rudelius says national public universities are in three businesses: athletics, undergraduate education and research. He says all three are in constant conflict with each other. He speaks about both the lack of focus on undergraduate education, using the University of Minnesota as an example, and about athletics at large public universities and their impact on both student athletes and the rest of the student body.

Undergraduate education, Rudelius says, gets lost in public universities because of the emphasis on research. He says faculty do what they're rewarded for, which is getting published in national journals. Undergraduate and graduate education should be split, he says, and many U of M deans, associate deans and assistant deans should be returned to the classroom.

Rudelius says the U of M's mission is, in order: (1) research and discovery; (2) teaching and learning; and (3) outreach and public service. He notes that the University's sports entertainment business (SEB) is conspicuously missing from the school's mission, but becomes very dominant in its decision-making.

He points out that in 2014, only 20 of the 1,083 Division I, II, and III SEB schools made a profit in athletics. Schools could reduce tuition if they figured out how to break even, he says. Rudelius speaks about the serious nature of injuries sustained by many college athletes and says the NCAA and the schools protect themselves when there are injuries.

In February 2020, Rudelius completed a paper that offers suggested solutions to the problems of university athletics programs, including their impact on athletes and on all other undergraduate students. As he wished, the Civic Caucus held the notes of Rudelius's interview until he finished his paper, "How to Get Student Athletes Back into the Classroom, Protect Their Health, Enrich Their Lives and Reduce Tuition for All Students."

**The paper follows the interview notes below.**

## Biography

**William (Bill) Rudelius** is professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota. He served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force, installing telephone communications with 25 airmen at a large, newly constructed air base in Chateauroux, France. He worked as an engineer in the jet engine and aerospace departments of General Electric, working on the first U.S. spy satellite (Corona) and on nose cones carrying atomic warheads, while in graduate school in business and economics on the G.I. bill. He directed an economic analysis section of a contract research center and taught marketing at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and the University of St. Thomas for four decades.

Rudelius has co-authored 22 editions of textbooks, including *Marketing*, currently in its 14th edition. In addition, *Marketing* has adaptations in 16 foreign languages, including Polish, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Chinese and Ukrainian. His articles have appeared in various academic journals, including *Journal of Marketing*, *Sloan Management Review*, *Harvard Business Review* and *Business Horizons*.

Rudelius's research interests include new product development, market segmentation and analysis, and high-technology startups. Over a period of two decades, he taught extensively

in nine European countries, including France, Bulgaria, Poland and Russia. Rudelius serves on the board of directors for several business and nonprofit organizations.

He holds a B.S. degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Wisconsin and an MBA in marketing and Ph.D. in applied economics from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

## Discussion

### Undergraduate education.

**National public universities are in three businesses: athletics, undergraduate education and research.** University of Minnesota (U of M) Emeritus Professor William (Bill) Rudelius said, "All of these are in constant conflict with each other. We have to address some of those issues." He defined public national universities as the roughly 300 institutions that offer many undergraduate majors and master's and doctorate degrees. Many of these institutions emphasize research, he said.

He said he's obsessed with undergraduate education, as well as K-12 education. Despite his many efforts over five decades to improve undergraduate education, he said, "I don't think I have anything to show for it."

Looking at the U of M, he said people who got undergraduate degrees before 1970 were on the quarter system and were required to have 180 credits to graduate, at three credits per course-that is, 60 courses. In 1970, a rule was passed that increased the credits per course from three to four, with an increase in writing required in all classes. So, he said, that reduced the number of required courses to 45.

Rudelius said when the U of M moved from quarters to semesters, the required number of credits was reduced to 120 at three credits per course. So that reduced the number of courses to 40. Over 10 years, he said, 20 courses were dropped from the undergraduate degree requirements.

**The current stated mission of the U of M is, in order: (1) research and discovery; (2) teaching and learning; and (3) outreach and public service.** Rudelius said the University's sports entertainment business (SEB) is conspicuously absent from the mission statement, but it becomes very dominant in decision-making at the school.

He said the fundamental issues are what the responsibilities are of a university's administration and faculty and the public to address the issues of athletics and academics.

**What portion of undergraduate education funding is subsidizing obscenely well-paid professors who hold positions as endowed chairs?** Rudelius asked that question and

said college and university presidents don't dare tackle the undergraduate program at their schools. Undergraduate education, he said, gets lost in public education because of the emphasis on research. He said faculty do what they're rewarded for, which is getting published in national journals.

Rudelius suggested that graduate and undergraduate education should be split from each other. He said 80 percent of undergraduate class hours in the U of M's Carlson School of Management are taught by adjunct faculty members. Many of them have business experience and are fine teachers, he said, but many full-time faculty members in the school have limited interactions with undergraduate students.

**The U of M is overwhelmed by administrators.** Rudelius said there are many deans, associate deans and assistant deans. "Get them back in the classrooms," he said. "And get instructors in the classroom who know what they want to do."

He noted that at the University of Minnesota, potential faculty hires are asked to give a presentation on their thesis. In contrast, at the University of St. Thomas, potential hires are asked to teach a sample class. "Why not put people in the classroom who are good at it and want to teach?" he asked.

"No university president, dean or department chair will say the school needs to increase faculty members' teaching load," Rudelius said. "It must be demanded by outside forces or parents. And never would a Big Ten president say we've got to improve undergraduate education."

An interviewer commented that a number of reputable private colleges are very good at undergrad education, along with the U of M's Morris campus. The interviewer said he sensed that the U of M's Saint Paul campus did not have the same problems with undergraduate education as the Minneapolis campus. Rudelius agreed. "The quality of undergraduate instruction has a higher priority on the Saint Paul campus," he said.

### Universities and athletics.

**There were 1,083 Division I, II, and III SEB schools in 2014; only 20 of them made a profit in athletics.** Rudelius said the median profit for these 20 schools was \$8.4 million and the median deficit for the other 1,063 schools was \$14.9 million. Schools could reduce tuition if they figured out how to break even, he said, noting that now less than one percent of SEB profits ever makes its way to undergraduate education.

**Concussions and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) are horrendous injuries.** Rudelius said college football players have a 91 percent chance of suffering concussions or CTEs. He said the NCAA and universities protect themselves when there are injuries.

**Today, men and women college tennis players spend five or six times as many hours during the school year as Rudelius did when he was a college athlete.** He played tennis at the University of Wisconsin and the tennis program lasted only 10 weeks. Freshmen were not eligible for the team at that time. Rudelius believes colleges should reinstate the freshmen rule, limiting athletes to only three years of varsity sports. He said that Big Ten schools should avoid the football playoffs to shorten the season.

The opportunity cost in money and time, he said, is the education athletes aren't getting when they don't have time to go to class.

**Colleges should limit the income of athletic coaches and make athletic facilities multipurpose, open to all students.** Rudelius said colleges should require students to take physical education for the first two years, noting that 30 to 40 percent of students report feeling stressed.

Rudelius said the **Drake Group**, which advocates for students and for reform in the NCAA, says the real problem is that faculty aren't speaking up about reining in athletics because they don't care about athletics. The group believes the public must be made aware of what is happening in college athletics, he said.

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**Rudelius's paper on college athletics follows.**

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**How to Get Student Athletes Back into the Classroom,  
Protect Their Health, Enrich Their Lives  
and Reduce Tuition for *A*ll Students**

by William Rudelius

February 2020

"No, we spend more during fall semester-probably about 60 hours a week," replied the 28-year old former university football player, in answer to my question. Naively, I had asked if he spent as many as 35 hours per week in varsity football. He pointed out that his 60-hour estimate included time for practices, games, travels, weight room and untold hours scrutinizing video of past games of the next week's opponent.

What *really* goes on today in university and college men's and women's sports? In answering that question, my objective here is to shock you enough to help us find a way to

ensure these student athletes can participate in their sport, while also obtaining a genuine education that prepares them for an after-college life. In the process, let's also stop coaches from telling prospects not to take a "serious major" and reduce tuition for *all* students-including the nonathletes whose extra fees and tuition subsidize the sports.

It's the silence. Some athletes facing major brain trauma, possible early death, and limited time for a real university education and experience because of their sport? Coaches paid 10 times that of their university president? Shouldn't someone speak out for corrective action? The general public? The fans? The university president or board? The faculty? You, the reader? Let's see.

**A *Very Curious* "Sports Entertainment Business."** Business school students are taught in their first management course that effective companies often ask themselves a key question: "What business are we in?" So setting their important research mission aside, I'll argue today's colleges and universities should be less in the "sports entertainment business" and more in the "undergraduate learning business"!

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)-not the schools themselves-oversees today's \$14 billion-a-year college sports entertainment business. The NCAA also organizes post-season play and markets the games and playoffs, which rewards it and successful teams with millions of dollars. To avoid financial losses, a school's football and men's basketball revenue sports must cover the costs of the remaining "nonrevenue sports"-like golf and gymnastics that *always* lose money.

Under changes suggested below, current proposals to enable college athletes to profit from their names, image, or likeness (NILs) that will start in 2023 will be unnecessary. Instead, athletes will halve the time in their sport, enabling them to become *real students*. Also, let's have the National Football League and National Basketball Association develop minor leagues for high school athletes wanting to skip college and enter professional sports directly, as professional baseball does.

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In athletic terms, *who are* these universities and colleges? The NCAA divides them into Division I, II and III levels, based mainly on their number of athletic scholarships and expenditures. In 2014, there were 1,083 NCAA members in the three divisions. The 346 large Division I schools offer many full athletic scholarships. Division II schools can offer

partial athletic scholarships, while Division III schools offer none. Only 20 of the 1,083 schools reported a profit in their athletics program. The remaining 1,063 schools used student fees (some over \$1,000 annually) and increased student tuition to cover athletics' financial losses.

The billions of dollars of revenues from media, shoe and apparel contracts, ticket sales and contributions make conferences and schools celebrate. Yet less than \$1 of every \$100 of athletic department revenues at public schools funds any academics. Income of winning coaches and costly team trips show the excesses. The highest paid public employees in 40 of the 50 states are college and university coaches, over 70 receiving more than \$1 million annually. And do we really need to send the football team off for a week in Rome or the women's volleyball team to play in Japan?

**Addressing Health Abuses and Academic Fraud.** For starters, the NCAA and its universities and colleges need the courage and integrity to honestly address the health abuses and academic fraud involving their half-million student athletes. Examples highlight how and why the NCAA and its schools don't act to address them.

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*It's estimated that 91 percent of college football players will later show Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) signs.*

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The most urgent health issue for athletes is chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), resulting in long-term mental impairment. CTE is due to both concussions and also the minor repetitive hits that occur with every athletic collision. This is not limited to male athletes; one study reported sports-related concussions (SRCs) per 10,000 athletic exposures is greater for women's field hockey than football. A Boston University study estimates 91 percent of college football players will later show CTE signs.

The story gets worse. Many major athletic programs fail to systematically track concussion data for their athletes because of cost. While the number of concussions is likely to grow because of the increased number of games in a season, many coaches are opposed to proposed actions to reduce them-fearing the loss of fan appeal.

Who covers the cost of an athlete's later mental impairment due to sports? Not the NCAA. It avoids that by *explicitly stating* that "its colleges and universities are exclusively responsible for protecting athletes from concussions." Not the schools either. So today's athletes, after their college days are over, can face huge personal costs from health issues, perhaps even CTEs. They are on their own to pay.

What about protecting athletes while practicing? After a player died from heat exhaustion during football practice, the NCAA identified standard guidelines providing protection in its published handbook. But *it does not require* its schools to follow them, apparently for fear of financial liability.

"The first 24 hours, I couldn't feel anything or really move," a redshirt freshman football player told a reporter for the *Minnesota Daily*, the University of Minnesota's student newspaper, about his injury in the first 2019 full-contact spring practice. The article noted "he was lucky he wasn't paralyzed" from the hit he took.

Doesn't the University of Minnesota's Board of Regents have oversight of the school's intercollegiate athletics program? Might it not require the elimination of full-contact practices in the University's football program to reduce the number of players who are paralyzed or have long-term brain trauma? And might it not suggest that other Big Ten schools do the same?

The NCAA also fails to police academic fraud. For 18 years, 3,100 students at a large university got "A" grades in fake classes requiring no work, almost half being athletes. Yet an NCAA panel found it "could not conclude these were academic violations by the school." The University of Minnesota, where I spent four decades, earned its own academic fraud award: In the 1990s, a secretary completed about 400 items of course work for 18 players on its men's basketball team.

**Then and Now: Sports Time vs. Study Time.** Let's contrast time spent in sports and studying by athletes six decades ago with those today. Starting my sophomore year, in the 1950s, I played three years of Big Ten tennis at the University of Wisconsin, when freshmen were not eligible to play varsity sports. They became eligible when rules changed after the Korean War started.

Our tennis team had 11 dual matches each spring, never playing Ohio State because of the time and cost to get there. A conference meet ended our 10-week season. We had no indoor courts, a part-time coach and no tennis during fall term. We were on our own to practice, exercise, and find tournaments in off-season to enhance skills. Today, Big Ten men's and women's tennis teams are on court all school year and often fly to tournaments in warm-weather states.

I was an engineering major, which required 145 credits to graduate, 25 more than most other majors. My freshman year I was in class 30 hours per week. On days I had afternoon labs, I only hit tennis balls for 30 or 45 minutes because most teammates had started practice several hours earlier and had left. I studied hard and had good grades.

Life changed the next spring during varsity tennis. Afternoon labs still meant less practice. I also found I could rarely study effectively while traveling to matches played on the road.



Often, I couldn't schedule an engineering lab the same semester I had the theory course linked to it. So I had great difficulty mentally connecting theory and application.

In 1952-53, my senior year, Big Ten football teams played 10 regular-season games. In contrast, Clemson University's 2018-2019 national-football-champion team played 15 games, counting playoff games. My senior year, the Wisconsin men's basketball team played 22 games, compared to the University of Virginia's 38 games to win the 2018-19 NCAA "March Madness" Basketball Championship.

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The time commitments of today's student athletes highlight the absurdity of NCAA guidelines and spotlight both its and its schools' abilities to shut their eyes to reality. The NCAA limits athletic-related activities to "*no more than 4 hours per day and 20 hours per week, not including travel time.*"

Yet one recent study shows that Division I men in the two revenue sports spent over 40 hours per week in athletics-related activities throughout the school year, *double the NCAA limit*. The travel ambiguity is also shown in a *Wall Street Journal* article reporting that eight of the best 2017-2018 men's basketball teams averaged over 42 days on the road for away games, perhaps half spent traveling. Those 21 travel days flout the absence of NCAA travel-time limits, thus again protecting the NCAA, its schools and their coaches-but not the athletes.

Many faculty members recommend students spend two to three hours studying for every hour in class. So, in theory, students taking 15 credits should spend 30 to 45 hours per week studying outside class-totaling 45 to 60 hours a week for both class and study. This means athletes spending 40 hours in their sport and 60 hours in class and studying for a 15-credit course load have 68 hours in their 168-hour week left for sleep, eating, meals and other extra-curricular activities!

My grade-point average (GPA) during the three terms I played tennis, *fell 0.7 points below* the terms I didn't. Sadly, between engineering and tennis, I completely missed the liberal arts. Today's men and women tennis players spend five-to-six times the hours in their sport during the school year as I did-with about three times as many matches. Football players and men's and women's basketball players often spend eight to 10 times as many school-year hours in their sport as I did in spring tennis.

Many universities have built and staffed new facilities to tutor college athletes, significantly improving their academics and eligibility. But watered-down classwork and grade inflation is another part of the story.

In their book *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (2010), Professors Richard Arum (New York University) and Josipa Roska (University of Virginia), reported the results of their survey of over 2,300 undergraduates at 24 schools from 2005 to 2007. They found the average student studied only 12 hours per week and 45 percent of students achieved no meaningful improvement in skills like critical thinking, writing and reasoning during their first two years of college. Yet, they found, 85 percent of students achieved a B-minus grade-point average or higher, with 55 percent achieving a B-plus grade-point average or higher.

The eight-school Ivy League, formed in 1954, provides more study time for its athletes. Its football teams have a 10-game schedule—seven conference games and three non-conference ones, generally with regional schools to reduce travel time. It competes in postseason NCAA men's and women's basketball championships, but not that for football. The Ivy League was the first conference to halt full-contact football practices, a model other NCAA conferences should find the courage to adopt.

**Why the Academic Silence?** The NCAA has demonstrated no serious commitment to addressing issues involving health abuses, academic fraud or study time for today's athletes. Let's analyze why universities and colleges aren't confronting the issues, either.

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*The real problem is faculty being unwilling to pay the terrible price of speaking truth about college athletics on their campus.*

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In 1999, Jon Ericson founded The Drake Group, academics who believe college athletics have become too dominant a force in American universities. In his 2016 book, *While Faculty Sleep*, about corruption in college sports, Ericson concludes the real problem is *not* the NCAA, money, alumni or coaches. Rather, it's the absence of faculty disclosure—faculty being unwilling to pay the terrible price of speaking truth about college athletics on their campus.

Ericson goes on to observe that "faculty members do not give a rat's ass about athletics." He says, "People become professors to be scholars, not warriors." They are told they are "disloyal" or are "hurting the university" if they discuss corruption. This explains my own silence in never speaking out to ensure the 1990s University of Minnesota basketball scandal couldn't happen again on my own campus.

Universities and colleges reap huge benefits for fielding winning teams, which provide incentives for their presidents, athletic directors and coaches to keep silent about unconscionable actions. Long-time football coach Mack Brown summarized his explanation in *The New York Times*: "When you have presidents and athletic directors talk about character and academics and integrity, none of that really matters...The truth is, nobody has ever been fired for those things. They get fired for losing."

**Recommended Actions.** Here is what is required to help athletes become real students again, lowering tuition *across-the-board* in the process:

- Reinstate the freshman rule. Let no male or female athletes play a varsity sport their first year in college. Have them spend their freshman year going to class, finding a major and learning time management and how to study at the college level.
- Limit athletes to only three years to play varsity sports. Halt red-shirting and fifth-year and sixth-year seniors. Don't allow athletes to play varsity sports after graduation. Get them a meaningful education and graduated. Reduce the number of athletes on teams.
- Follow the Ivy League model and eliminate full-contact collegiate football practices.
- Reorganize teams into smaller regional conferences with fewer teams (as in the past), thereby lowering travel time and cost and increasing study time for athletes-the Ivy League model.
- Convert many nonrevenue sports to club sports with shorter seasons, only playing nearby competitors. Drop others entirely. Make all sports but men's and women's basketball one term, thus providing athletes increased study time the other term.
- Reduce the number of intercollegiate games/matches for every female and male sport before conference and national playoffs begin-say 10 for football, 25 for women's and men's basketball, 40 for women's softball and men's baseball, etc. This will reduce injuries, increase study time and graduate healthier athletes with more challenging majors.
- Repurpose newly-surplus athletic facilities for more intramural sports and gym classes for the majority of college students who need healthy exercise, especially given their epidemic levels of stress.
- Achieve public transparency of athletic programs by requiring them to disclose their financial records annually. This will help curb athletic departments from using undergraduate fees and tuition to fund their programs, instead allowing the colleges and universities to use these funds to educate *all* students.

- Require schools showing losses to act to break even on athletics. Use the cost savings to reduce tuition for all undergraduate students, thus saving them thousands of dollars annually.
- Conduct and publish rigorous research studying ways to reduce injuries and provide a more meaningful post-college life for athletes. Do the analysis by sport, measuring variables like academic major, graduation rates, time spent in activities in their sport (games, practice, travel, etc.), and quality of life 10 and 25 years after graduation.
- Hold each university's board of governors, as well as its president, accountable for taking these actions and making these badly needed changes.

Implementing the actions on this list results in both bad news and good news:

- For many, the scariest bad news is that the quality of revenue sports-football and men's basketball-offered by the sports entertainment businesses will decline because of the reduced hours of practice time and games played. So will revenues from TV, ticket sales and fan contributions arising from winning teams. The number of nonrevenue sports and athletes will also decline.
- For the good news, serious injuries to athletes will decline, as will undergraduate tuition for *a//*students. Student athletes will spend more time in class, thus discovering the opportunity and time to become historians, teachers, writers, engineers, medical doctors, and involved citizens.

**Achieving Disclosure and Results.** How will both faculty and the general public accept Jon Ericson's challenge and achieve the public transparency necessary to push our schools to address the current injustice to student athletes? To achieve genuine results, the actions by both groups must (1) be simple, (2) focus on their own school, and (3) gain significant publicity.

Here's my request:

- Send a message to the president and board of governors of the university in which you are interested. Include in the message that you will hold the university's board of governors and its president accountable for taking these actions and making these badly needed changes.
- Tell the board members and president they are responsible for their school's intercollegiate athletics programs and they must act to rein in those programs in order to: (1) protect student athletes' health and their ability to actually benefit academically during their time in college; (2) lower tuition for *a//*students; and (3) return to the school's real mission: the education of undergraduate students.

- Ask that your university publicly disclose data annually by sport on athletes' concussions and other serious injuries, their federal graduation rates, and their mean GPA, compared to the general student body. Ask the university to publish a public annual report or newspaper article-with data-identifying positive changes that result.
- Finally, send copies of the message to the editors of the student newspaper and the local newspaper. Press them to follow up and report on this requested public data and also to provide coverage of any action-or lack of action-the university takes to rein in its intercollegiate athletics programs.

Let's see if anything good happens.