

In this issue, we celebrate the hard work and accomplishments of our student-athletes, the ways sports broaden the academic experience, and how athletics helps shape today's students into tomorrow's leaders.



Dear alumni and friends of Rockford College,
We often hear about the feats, or troubles, of intercollegiate athletes and intercollegiate athletic programs. But how often do we take time to really think about the place of intercollegiate athletics in the educational experience of our students and our college? When do we take time to understand and celebrate the hard work our student-athletes pursue — their accomplishments, and ultimately, how participating in athletics helps shape today's students to be tomorrow's leaders? What do we really know about the influence intercollegiate athletics has on a student's ability, interest, or motivation to learn?

This edition of DECUS, and its focus on intercollegiate athletics, attempts to address these questions and others, illustrating for us in very real ways how we live our vision to be Jane Addams' college in the 21st century. As a college that seeks to realize, "an expansive liberal arts approach to our work as a teaching and learning community," as stated in our 21st Century Plan, the articles featured here suggest that participating in collegiate sports not only enhances the overall educational experience for students, but as alumni, staff, and trustees attest, can and does produce life-long benefits.

I hear all the time that intercollegiate athletics is either the most important reason a student is in college, or a reason that should have no bearing or influence on a student's enrollment at Rockford College. What I would rather hear is the elevation of the discussion to a dialogue about the place for intercollegiate athletics, not just in campus life, but in the pursuit of educational experiences that have significant and practical meaning for students.

Intercollegiate athletics fits with the broader purposes of college in three ways. First, social scientists who study how students learn have come to understand that learning involves integrated actions and influences through multiple settings. This constructivist view of learning suggests that rather than being passive recipients of information, students today seek knowledge through active collaborations with faculty, staff, peers, and yes, even coaches. The challenge for those of us who seek to engage students in their learning

is to help them make meaningful connections between our mission, the curriculum, and what they experience in the multiple settings where student life happens (i.e., athletics, the residence halls, forums, internships, student organizations, etc.).

Second, John Dewey, the University of Chicago philosopher and contemporary of Jane Addams, argued that a liberal education requires the development of a broad set of skills and habits of mind. As you will read in the article written by our Director of Athletics Kristyn King '89 (pg. 26) and in the story about Kansas State's women's basketball coach Deb Patterson '79 (pg. 30), the experiences they had and the skills they developed at Rockford College have been instrumental not only in their success, but in the subsequent success of the students with whom they work.

Third, American higher education, as the authors of Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility argue, plays a critical role in promoting democracy by helping students become responsible citizens in the world and in their communities. For Rockford College, this involves linking learning and citizenship through our commitments to liberal arts education, to civic engagement, and to being an agile and accountable institution. Intercollegiate athletics, when seen and organized as a part of the larger educational experience, as you will see from the following articles, can and does prepare participants to lead remarkable lives as citizens who make real and significant differences in the world.

As we pursue our vision to be Jane Addams' college in the 21st century, it is time we rethink the role intercollegiate athletics plays in the pursuit of our mission. Ideally, we would find ways to use the power of the experience for students to not only enhance the overall educational experience, but to produce lessons that lead to effective and engaged citizenship.

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