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[Education is Forever...](#)

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On March 21, 2008 as the First and Second Round of the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament was getting underway, Dr. Bobby Fong, President of Butler University in Indianapolis, wrote an essay entitled, "Academics and Athletics," that was published on the Op-Ed page of the Indianapolis Star. He spoke about graduation as an issue of trust. Dr. Fong stated that the basketball team's success in recent years had given the university the opportunity to showcase their message on a national stage. The Butler message: "Our students' achievements on the basketball court are but part of their larger educational achievement." The Bulldogs team this year boasted a First Team Academic All-American and a District V All-Academic player and this year's team had the second highest graduation rate of the 64 team field. Dr Fong cited other examples of academic accomplishments by student athletes as but one example of 3900 Butler students. At the conclusion of his essay he said,

"We all revel in our teams' successes in the NCAA tournaments. But it would be a failure of trust if we exulted in the abilities of a young student-athlete but did not succeed in graduating him or her. Athletic fame will be fleeting for the overwhelming majority of the student-athletes we'll be watching in these tournaments. But education is forever."

Hopefully, as the excitement builds approaching the Men's and Women's Final Four, CEOs and Athletics Directors will use this opportunity to highlight academic as well as athletics accomplishments and to remind student athletes of the fleeting nature of athletic fame for most of them. More importantly, for those administrators at institutions with teams and student athletes performing poorly academically it is hoped that a commitment will be made at the highest level to improve the performance. Presidents and Chancellors have always maintained that the justification for the existence of big-time sports programs in the higher education setting is that athletics is a legitimate part of the academic mission of the institution. It is incumbent on people in these leadership positions to ensure the legitimacy of the "scholar athlete" in academia.

So who has the greatest impact on student athlete academic performance? Coaches often state that it is the student athlete who is ultimately accountable for his/her academic achievement but that is often used by the coach as an excuse for poor performance. It is very clear to this writer, however, that in each individual sport team at every institution it is the head coach who "sets the tone" for academic achievement by student athletes. If it is a high priority and a point of emphasis on a daily basis by the coach it will be a priority of the student athletes. Obviously, if the CEO and AD have academics as a high priority it is helpful but if the head coach doesn't and isn't held accountable the end result will be "a failure of trust" and a disservice to the student athletes. It amounts to exploitation and the young men and women deserve better.

To read Dr. Fong's entire essay, [click here](#).

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