

NEWS RELEASE



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Research shows Laurier student-athletes are winners in the classroom

WATERLOO – An analysis of three decades of research on Laurier student-athletes' academic performance has revealed a significant improvement over time. The study, conducted by professor William McTeer, shows that student-athletes in the 2000s are on average doing as well or better academically than other students.

"Laurier invests extensively in the academic success of our student-athletes, and we insist that they take their studies seriously," said David McMurray, the university's vice-president, Student Affairs. "But it wasn't until Bill compiled this material that we realized the full extent of how well our student-athletes are doing academically, while continuing to excel in intercollegiate competition. I'm proud of them."

The results show that in the 1980s, 87.8 per cent of Laurier student-athletes graduated from their programs. Today, 94 per cent of student-athletes graduate compared to 86.7 per cent of non-athletes. Laurier student-athletes' average grades on a 12-point scale also increased from 6.76 in the 1980s to 7.48 today. The average grade at Laurier today for non-athletes is 7.44. A further indication of academic quality is that the current admission average of student-athletes is 81.5 per cent compared to an overall non-athlete admission average of 81.4 per cent.

Laurier officials attribute the improvements in part to the university's holistic approach to student-athlete success. The university places a strong emphasis on academic performance when recruiting athletes. It encourages athlete success in the classroom through academic mentorship programs and referrals to specialist tutors. And students must maintain a passing average in their academic coursework to continue to play their sports.

"We are focusing on developing the whole student-athlete – academically, athletically and personally," said Peter Baxter, the university's director of Athletics & Recreation. "Sport itself can teach a number of skills, such as leadership, hard work and cooperation, but it's not the whole picture. The degree is central."

McTeer, a professor in the department of Kinesiology & Physical Education, began collecting the data in the early 1980s, compiled a second set in the 1990s, and recently completed a third set for the 2000s. He says the average student-athlete invests about 20 hours per week in his or her sport. "We seem to have a healthy balance here between academics and athletics," he said.

The university's student-athletes have received significant recognition. Between 2000 and 2012, the Laurier Golden Hawks won 35 championships, including eight national championships. Between 2000 and 2010, 248 Laurier athletes earned CIS Academic All-Canadian honours. Football's Dillon Heap was named a CIS Top 8 Academic All-Canadian in 2009-10.

The university is continuing to hone its approach to nurturing student-athletes' academic performance, and McTeer is curious to know the impact of new measures. "If I'm here in another ten years, I'll certainly be taking a look," he said.