

## Reflections on the Presence of Play in University Arts and Athletics

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### 1. Introduction

#### *a. The question of play*

In December 2014 the University of Alabama at Birmingham cut its football, bowling, and rifle programs.<sup>1</sup> That same week, East Stroudsburg University announced a decision to cut its music program and lay off two tenured faculty members.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, finances were blamed for making the cuts necessary. From the outside these situations may appear similar; with tightening budgets and reduced state allocation, many universities must make significant program cuts. Yet the actual elimination of these programs is quite different given their status at the university. Athletics have been associated with the university since the nineteenth century, but they have been seen traditionally as distinct from academics. Even physical education requirements, once present at most universities, are becoming increasingly scarce. In contrast, music is a core academic department or discipline at most universities. It is a staple of liberal arts education, while athletics are considered extracurricular activities.

Recent work has explored the extent to which intercollegiate athletics even belong at the university or meet the university's mission.<sup>3</sup> A common response from the academy holds that athletics are too frivolous or insignificant, essentially too playful, to be associated with intellectual endeavors. Yet, just as play seems evident in athletics, it is also present in music, art, and theater. While these programs are popular targets when discussing possible cuts, few question their legitimacy at the university. I believe that incorporating music, art, and theater within the academy while keeping intercollegiate sports extracurricular is, in general, well-founded.

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<sup>1</sup> All three programs were reinstated in 2015, with football scheduled to return in 2017.

<sup>2</sup> An agreement was later reached to keep the two faculty members in question.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Myles Brand, "The Role and Value of Intercollegiate Athletics in Universities," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 33, no. 1 (2006), pp. 9-20; and Peter A. French, *Ethics and College Sports* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

However, in this article I argue that the justification for retaining the extracurricular status of intercollegiate sports should be based on their being especially playful. Indeed, on the basis of this argument, I suggest that universities offer even greater and wider access to sport through club and intramural sports.

Moreover, while athletics might appear to be more playful, I hold that there is substantially more play present in university music, art, and theater programs than there is in intercollegiate sports. Examination of the claim that there is a more significant presence of play in the arts than in intercollegiate athletics provides two additional benefits to our understanding of the nature of play. First, by examining the existence of play currently found in the university, we can better understand the nature of play itself and the various forms in which it is found. Second, we are reminded that common sentiment about the value of play is misleading. Many believe that play is supposed to be a matter primarily for children, not a component of core university activities like the transmission of knowledge and critical inquiry.<sup>4</sup> However, the presence of play in the university, be it in the arts or sport, suggests that play holds value for adults as well. Thus, it is valuable for universities to expand both playful sport and the arts at the university rather than further restrict these opportunities.

***b. A note on the nature of play***

Examining the complex nature of play in any context requires addressing two central obstacles. The first pertains to defining play. Despite increased academic attention, play has not sufficiently been distinguished from other activities. Without a clear set of necessary and sufficient characteristics, play remains a moving target for philosophical analysis. I submit that activities cannot themselves be characterized as play or not play, but we can explore play through the features most commonly associated with it. For the purposes of this article, I accept the well-known characteristics of play presented by John Loy, which were derived from previous work by Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois. According to Loy, play is free, separate (that is,

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Simon proposes these as the major functions of the university. See Robert L. Simon, Cesar R. Torres, and Peter F. Hager, *Fair Play: The Ethics of Sport*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2015), p. 162. Simon provided this definition in an earlier, single-authored edition of this book. I have argued elsewhere that the engagement of play serves the Nietzschean goals of becoming oneself and creating meaningful activities in life; see Aaron Harper, "Playing, Valuing, and Living: Examining Nietzsche's Playful Response to Nihilism," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 50, no. 2 (2016), pp. 318-20. While I cannot defend here the importance of continually remaking identity and character throughout life, if play is in fact a significant feature of programs currently found within the academy, I believe we can reasonably infer that the value of play continues through adulthood and does not diminish with age.

spatially and temporally limited), uncertain, unproductive, and make-believe (that is, outside ordinary or real life).<sup>5</sup>

Play occurs in numerous forms. In competitive play, such as games, it involves the creation of a play-world based on rule and order. In other forms, play embodies the characteristics of freedom, exploration, and creativity. Kenneth Schmitz differentiates the play varieties of frolic and make-believe, in which imagination trumps rule-creation.<sup>6</sup> Through play, features of the world gain new significances; a mountain becomes an obstacle literally to be overcome, a previous time is a challenge to be bested, or a room is transformed into a faraway kingdom. These new meanings allow an individual to test herself or explore new possibilities. In doing so, she may adopt new identities or roles, which can be ephemeral or have lasting significance. Play also instigates a re-imagination of social relations. The interaction of individuals in the play-world upsets traditional dynamics and provides individuals with new forms of interaction, even new relationships. For instance, in the play of a basketball game or holiday party, the relationship between a manager and employee may take the form of teammate, rival, or karaoke partner. Many forms of play are inherently social or occur within a play community, with membership renewed upon each instance of play, sometimes spilling over into real life.

A second obstacle to examining play is that it seems to depend, at least in part, on the individual's attitude. To play requires a certain motivation or form of engagement, a spirit of play independent from the activity itself. If so, then virtually anything—or nothing—can be play at any given moment. Consequently, if play depends on an individual's attitude in the moment, it might seem a fool's errand to look for any essential play independent of particular people. Yet, I propose that we can approach activities and institutions, in this case those of the university, in terms of commonly associated motivations and incentives. While most activities are undertaken for various aims, playful and otherwise, we can evaluate which activities tend to be, or are more likely to be, engaged in a playful manner or include playful elements.

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<sup>5</sup> See John W. Loy, Jr., "The Nature of Sport: A Definitional Effort," *Quest* 10, no. 1 (1968), pp. 1-15. Loy's list also includes being rule-governed, but his description of this element refers only to games and sports, not to play itself. I have not included it, since I do not believe that all play must be rule-governed. In some forms of play the rules themselves are up for grabs, unlike games and sports, which require a relatively stable set of rules.

<sup>6</sup> See Kenneth Schmitz, "Sport and Play: Suspension of the Ordinary," in *Sport and the Body: A Philosophical Symposium*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Ellen W. Gerber and William J. Morgan (Philadelphia, PA: Lea & Febiger, 1979), pp. 23-24.

## 2. Playing in Intercollegiate Athletics

### a. Professionalization and trickle-down

In this section I examine the amount of play present in intercollegiate athletics, and I argue that play appears to be diminished by the manner in which sports have developed at the university. I begin with a comparison of intercollegiate athletics to professional sports, which many also believe present a diminished experience of play. Sports might seem to be obvious instances of play in nearly every context, perhaps even paradigmatic instances of play. After all, an individual “plays” a sport, and the choice to play sports is usually motivated by enjoyment and indicates preference to sport over other possible activities. Nonetheless, many scholars suggest that sports occasionally deviate from play. For instance, in their analysis of the “tricky triad” of play, games, and sport both Bernard Suits and Klaus Meier hold that professional sports remain outside the category of play. Chad Carlson aptly terms this puzzle the Paradox of Professional Athletes, though I propose that it applies to intercollegiate athletes as well.<sup>7</sup>

A common strategy to exclude professional sports from play is to deny that it embodies one of play’s essential characteristics. For example, Suits claims that professional sports are “instruments for external purposes” like money, differentiating them from amateur sports which are fundamentally play.<sup>8</sup> Meier stresses that play must be done for its own sake, which is not itself a necessary condition of games or sport. In his estimation, the commercialization of sport has increasingly diminished the play motive in contemporary sport.<sup>9</sup> On these interpretations, non-play sports are distinguished by being obligatory, not done for their own sake, or insufficiently distinct from the concerns of ordinary life.

Another strategy uses work to contrast professional sports with play. If play is unproductive and unordinary, work is supposed to be the epitome of production and real life. When playing a sport constitutes one’s job, this would seem to preclude it as an instance of play. Nonetheless, while the play/work opposition seems intuitive, the complexities of human motivation

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<sup>7</sup> Chad Carlson, “A Three-Pointer: Revisiting Three Crucial Issues in the ‘Triad Trickery’ of Play, Games, and Sport,” in *Defining Sport*, ed. Shawn E. Klein (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), forthcoming.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Suits, “Tricky Triad: Games, Play, and Sport,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 15, no. 1 (1988), p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> See Klaus V. Meier, “Triad Trickery: Playing With Sport and Games,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 15, no. 1 (1988), pp. 25-28. Similarly, John Gerdy argues that “college sports is packaged, marketed, and projected purely as entertainment, with the promotion of educational themes, values, and information an afterthought at best”; see John R. Gerdy, “Higher Education’s Failed Experiment with Professional Athletics,” in *New Game Plan for College Sport*, ed. Richard E. Lapchick (Westport, CT: American Council on Education and Praeger Publishers, 2006), p. 65.

should lead us to recognize that play and work do not always occur separately. Carlson, building on the work of Scott Kretchmar, proposes that work and play function as a complementary pair, with many activities being a mixture of the two. Individuals continually shift between them, although one intention—play or work—is usually the dominant one at any given time.<sup>10</sup> I agree with Carlson’s approach because I believe it works from a more plausible understanding of motivation and action. Activities are not always done for a single reason, and the reasons do not remain constant. The complementary-pair approach allows professional athletes to be engaged in both work and play, even if professional athletes often experience less intrinsic satisfaction than do amateur athletes, as may be the typical case with work.

Unlike professional sports, intercollegiate athletics have not received extensive examination with respect to play. The so-called revenue-producing sports of football and men’s basketball are akin to professional sports in terms of their external purposes and commercialization, so if play is diminished in professional sports, we can likely conclude that it is also diminished in these college sports. But other college sports like swimming or lacrosse do not seem substantially professionalized. In particular, the amount of money involved is comparatively small, and few see these sports at the college level as means to lucrative professional careers.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the amount of play present in these other sports cannot be settled solely by a comparison to professional sports.

Schmitz offers a useful framework we can utilize to evaluate the play elements in intercollegiate athletics more generally. He presents three features of modern sport that serve to diminish the spirit of play.<sup>12</sup> The first two features are internal to the activity: the exaggeration of victory and techniques of efficiency, the latter making sports explicitly rational and abstract with too narrow a conception of good performance. These serve to diminish play by separating out victory and performance from their play context. The third feature, the presence of spectators, constitutes an external threat to play. Schmitz argues that spectators threaten to alienate play because they risk introducing a new set of values in opposition to those fundamental to play. In support, he notes that spectators often introduce a commercial element to sport which changes the nature of the contest. After further explication, though, it is clear that Schmitz’s worry goes beyond money to the motivation to play. Playing for the spectators, including for reasons of money, fame, or contract,

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<sup>10</sup> See Carlson, “A Three-Pointer.”

<sup>11</sup> Of course, relatively few players actually go on to play professional football or basketball. However, I would argue that far more players in these sports at the college and high school levels see themselves as potential professionals or draft picks.

<sup>12</sup> See Schmitz, “Sport and Play,” pp. 27-29.

becomes obligatory, thus undermining values associated with the play-world, such as relationships with teammates.

Using Schmitz's standards, it is reasonable to conclude that intercollegiate sports of all types and at most levels offer, at the very least, a diminished experience of play. College sports clearly exaggerate victory. While standards are certainly highest at Division I universities and in football and men's basketball, a coach's job security at all levels in every sport is closely tied to wins and losses. Consequently, the importance of victory motivates the extreme efficiency that Schmitz highlights. Since evaluation of the team's success is largely in terms of victories, job security depends on defeating the next opponent through any available means. If coaches, including both head coaches and assistants, are evaluated in terms of winning, their focus, and ultimately that of players, narrows to the scoreboard and the short-term strategies to win.

Athletic scholarships add commercial and contractual components to sport, akin to the effect of spectators, because they essentially make student-athletes employees under the purview of coaches and athletic departments.<sup>13</sup> For many Division I and Division II student-athletes, the possibility of an affordable or debt-free education outweighs their actual (dis)interest in competing for another four years, rendering scholarship-inclusive intercollegiate athletics more work than play. Scholarships also exaggerate the importance of victory, given that few schools give out four-year scholarships. Most scholarships must be renewed every year. There is a general understanding that a student-athlete's scholarship will be continued absent extraordinary circumstances. Yet many counter-examples can be found in which scholarships were not renewed. The tenuous nature of scholarships highlights the limited control, outside of transferring, that many student-athletes have. In order to continue their education, they may feel forced to follow very specific instructions, well beyond the ordinary considerations of the sport, in order to remain in good standing with those who determine their scholarships.

One might argue that the other aspects of college athletics I have described also apply only to larger schools in conferences known for athletic success. I concede that less commercial sports or programs at smaller schools may remain somewhat freer from some elements of professionalization, such as the values introduced by the presence of spectators that might threaten to undermine the essential playfulness of sport. However, I argue that victory

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<sup>13</sup> This status was reaffirmed by a 2015 National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) decision regarding student athletes. The NLRB dismissed a petition by Northwestern University football players to unionize as employees with the right to collective bargaining, effectively reaffirming the NCAA view that college athletes are primarily students. See Ben Strauss, "N.L.R.B. Rejects Northwestern Football Players' Union Bid," *The New York Times* (August 17, 2015), accessed online at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/18/sports/ncaafotball/nlrbsays-northwestern-football-players-cannot-unionize.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/18/sports/ncaafotball/nlrbsays-northwestern-football-players-cannot-unionize.html?_r=0).

and efficiency are exaggerated in nearly all college sports through what I call the revenue-producing trickle-down effect. Football and men's basketball in power conferences require significant university infrastructure and resources. Although these are created primarily for success in these sports, their rules, requirements, and standards apply to other sports as well. For instance, we find schools at all levels building impressive new athletic facilities primarily for use by athletes, often to the exclusion of the general student population. Nearly all sports, from baseball to women's bowling, including many sports at levels below Division I, hold championship tournaments televised by ESPN and other major networks. There is more pressure than ever for athletic programs to garner national attention. Meanwhile, success by some schools in a conference or region leads other schools to try to keep up with the Joneses, otherwise risking status, recruiting power, and revenue. This same motivation applies to smaller Division I and Division II schools, especially as transferring becomes more common among student-athletes. Even schools with a marginal history of athletic success cannot easily opt-out of a system that highlights athletic success above all, with athletics aiding marketing and alumni contributions. Thus, when play is diminished in some intercollegiate athletics, the effect spreads to its competitors, diminishing the amount of play present elsewhere.

***b. The conception of play in intercollegiate athletics***

Even if the amount of play present in intercollegiate athletics is relatively diminished through its infrastructure, professional, and commercial elements, play surely remains in some form, and this play provides value for the participants. Myles Brand, a philosopher who served as president of Indiana University and head of the NCAA, provides a list of the positive values demonstrated in intercollegiate athletics, including “striving for excellence, perseverance, resilience, hard work, respect for others, sportsmanship and civility, and losing—and winning—with grace.”<sup>14</sup> While these values are not unique to either sport or play, their inclusion highlights some aspects of play still present in intercollegiate athletics. In particular, the appeal to sportsmanship and grace in both winning and losing provides a counter to the exaggeration of victory and efficiency. That is, to the extent that we can find such values present in intercollegiate athletics, we may conclude that playful elements retain influence.

Of course, one may question whether Brand's view of sport and its role in building character is too romanticized.<sup>15</sup> My argument in the previous

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<sup>14</sup> Brand, “Intercollegiate Athletics,” p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> In all likelihood, we should not be so quick to grant these benefits to sport. For two excellent critical discussions of the claim that intercollegiate athletics build character, see French, *Ethics*, pp. 31-62, and John R. Gerdy, *The Successful College Athletic Program* (Phoenix, AZ: American Council on Education and the Oryx Press, 1997), pp. 36-38.

section suggests that we should expect these values to be eroded further by victory and professionalization, if current trends continue. Moreover, in other attempts to defend the value of athletics to the university, we find that play is not given a central role. In their influential book *Fair Play*, Robert Simon, Cesar Torres, and Peter Hager characterize athletics as a test in which participants must understand their own strengths and weaknesses, work hard for improvement, and react intelligently and skillfully within the context. Sporting contests also promote good judgment, critical analysis, and focus under pressure. They go on to argue that sports provide “significant mutual reinforcement” with academics.<sup>16</sup> While undergraduates are basically novices in most areas of research, they may attain higher levels of success in athletics and other performance-based activities. Achievement in sports may aid value and skill development, such as analyzing and overcoming weaknesses or reacting effectively to new situations, which also benefit their academic and professional careers.

These valuable achievements again do not seem unique to sport. More to the point, though, the values of intercollegiate sports are developed through a conception of them as physical activities of a highly competitive nature, organized around the pursuit of victory. Competition itself obviously does not preclude play, and it is inherent to forms of play like games, but we must acknowledge that whatever play exists in intercollegiate athletics is of a limited form. Play, I suggested above, occurs in many forms, some competitive but others highlighting imagination, creativity, and improvisation. By taking only the form of highly competitive, rule-governed play, intercollegiate athletics do not embody the diverse possibilities of play. If play is itself diminished in intercollegiate athletics, then even this narrow experience of play is not widely shared.

From these considerations, we can draw two initial conclusions about the play present in intercollegiate athletics. First, their play is diminished when compared to other instances of these same sports. Football and men’s basketball closely resemble professional sports, which bear more elements of work than play. Other sports are trending in this direction, given the exaggeration of victory and efficiency; structural considerations like scholarships; and schools modeling the methods of successful, more professional programs. Second, the form of play present in intercollegiate athletics is relatively narrow, reflecting a certain conception of competitive team sports at the expense of other forms of play.

### **3. Playing in the Arts**

We can now turn to the play present in university arts like music, art, and theater. Outside of the university, these activities would seem to be paradigmatic instances of play, freely chosen for their own sake. Schmitz’s

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<sup>16</sup> Simon, Torres, and Hager, *Fair Play*, p. 176.



analysis of the conditions that diminish the presence of play can help to evaluate these activities as they exist within the university. On his first point, these activities are unlikely to risk exaggerating the importance of victory. Competitions in music, art, and theater are not nearly as pervasive as in sport, and their associated university jobs rarely hinge on championships. Furthermore, while many schools offer scholarships for artistic programs and extracurricular activities, these scholarships do not dominate the creation of an ensemble or participation in the activities to the same degree as they do for Division I and Division II athletics.

Schmitz's latter two causes of the diminishing of play, exaggerated efficiency and spectators, are potentially greater cause for concern. To take the latter first, I hold that spectators do not generally diminish play in the arts. Of course, spectators have some analogous effects in each. For instance, a pickup basketball game feels quite different when played in front of a crowd. Some players may feel nervous, while others might seek to fire up the crowd. Similarly, a musician may feel nervous when playing in front of a crowd. The point, though, is not whether the activity is transformed at all, but instead whether the fundamental values of the activity are altered by the presence of spectators. This is often the case in sport, but I argue that usually spectators do not have this transformative effect on the values of artistic performance. Although art need not be created directly for others, most artists create for an audience or otherwise expect their work to be consumed by others, even when creating primarily for themselves. More simply, an audience is unlikely to disrupt significantly the play-world through the likes of commercialization or professionalization, or make the activity obligatory in any novel manner.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, any university audience is unlikely to diminish substantially the play already present in the arts, as does occur in intercollegiate athletics.<sup>18</sup>

Though spectators are not necessarily a problem, the university setting produces a unique kind of spectator who may introduce divergent values, namely, the instructor. When artistic creations are to be evaluated by a specific person in an academic capacity, the portending evaluation can easily influence the aims and techniques of the project. However, unlike sport, the

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<sup>17</sup> One might object to this distinction based on the definition of sport. One tradition, following Bernard Suits, holds that an activity must have a wide following in order to be considered a sport. However, I am claiming that there is an important difference between a sport having a wide following in general and any particular game being played for spectators. The latter can be a cause of diminished play, but not the former.

<sup>18</sup> Though I cannot explore the matter further here, I speculate that the fundamental difference between art and sport with respect to spectators can be explained by the presence of competition. I have argued that intercollegiate sports are essentially about competition, while the arts are not, even though the arts may have occasional competitions. Yet, if we imagine a music program organized like a sport, in which the primary aim is to defeat an opponent in a competition, spectators may then have a deleterious effect on the presence of play.

new audiences for artistic creations are less likely to create a commercial environment for the endeavor. Any commercial or advertising components will pale in comparison to those of major college sports.

The more general risk to play is that an instructor increases the presence of the work motivation, pushing aside that of play. This highlights a larger point: the forces that diminish the play elements of university music, art, and theater are primarily those that undercut the voluntary nature of play. In the academic setting, students often have limited choices regarding their projects. In a related fashion, artistic endeavors completed for an assignment are less likely to be created or performed for their own sake and do not stand outside the concerns of real life. Of course, artists may be able to develop their own projects that fit broad assignment parameters, but in many cases artistic projects are obligatory or otherwise modified in ways that they would not be outside the university. Again, the level at which the work is done, along with the particular instructor, suggest that the dominance of play in any particular artistic endeavor will vary greatly from one case to another.

Music, art, and theater differ from intercollegiate sports in that they have both academic and extracurricular forms. I have argued thus far that the academic or classroom versions of these retain significant play elements, especially at more advanced levels, even as projects are routinely constrained by university requirements. The amount of play in the arts compares favorably, and often outstrips, that of intercollegiate athletics. However, the extracurricular analogues of these arts, such as a musical ensemble, literary magazine, or theater production, are likely to sustain even more features of play, since their extracurricular nature reintroduces voluntary and autotelic elements. When the performances are no longer done for academic credit, participants are freer to engage simply for reasons of enjoyment or preference.

As for the former concern, it initially seems plausible that the study and performance of music, art, and theater in an academic setting could exaggerate efficiency and other limiting techniques at the expense of creativity, though individual cases will vary widely. As a general rule, we might expect that introductory classes or lower-level performances will emphasize common techniques or motifs, with advanced work more likely to provide opportunities for experimentation. For example, a student of ceramics will likely study and apply well-known strategies in required coursework before creating her own style in a thesis or capstone project. Thus, efficiency in this context is used as a means of education, but students are expected to move beyond these methods once they are mastered. Accordingly, efficiency in the arts functions more often as a means to increased playfulness through creativity and freedom, rather than serving to alienate the activity from play as is commonly the case in sports.

It is noteworthy that the arts housed within the academic structure of the university retain a significant presence of play, especially as students reach more advanced levels, as noted above in the ceramics example. This suggests that play does not exist in opposition to academics. Rather, playfulness is routinely essential to meeting course objectives in the arts. While basic skills

and techniques must be imparted, the ability of students to create and perform works of art succeeds primarily when a professor is able to embrace the fundamental playfulness of the activity. Art made at the university is created in a playful process, even when done for academic requirements. Even though extracurricular artistic endeavors may offer paradigmatic instances of play, the playful creative process is not significantly diminished from music, art, and theater in an academic context.

In addition to the greater presence of play when compared to intercollegiate athletics, the arts embrace more fully the many forms of play as described in Section 1.b. I argued above that whatever play remains present in intercollegiate sport is defined narrowly, conceived of as physical competition to attain victory over an opponent. Music or art can admit of similar competitions, but like other games they can also be played without a significant physical component, or in a more relaxed or social atmosphere. Furthermore, forms of play like frolic and make-believe, which emphasize imagination and creativity, are far more evident in music, art, and theater performances. Playing, creating, or play-acting need not be defined by rules or formal structure, and are instead invented and remade as the participants aver. The movements and obstacles are created within the play-world; their significance depends on how they are approached, as when the artist chooses the medium or the musician chooses the style and piece to perform. Ultimately, music, art, and theater better capture the freedom of play and its intrinsic exploration of new perspectives.

The play present in the arts, when compared to intercollegiate athletics, is more obviously unproductive, voluntary, and done for its own sake. The arts also better capture the manner in which play remakes social relations. Sports and games may implement a new dynamic between individuals, but interactions between players are typically more rigid and rule-governed. Sports categorize those one encounters as either teammates or opponents, with either potentially becoming a personal antagonist. In contrast, music and theater offer an array of interactions, from scripted to fully improvisational. The arts also reflect solitary and social varieties of play, without the constraints of the team environment.

In the end, we find that play is significantly more present at the university in music, art, and theater than in intercollegiate athletics for two overarching reasons. First, the arts at the university, in both their academic and extracurricular forms, are more freely chosen and less constrained. Even when done for a specific assignment, the goal is the development of an individual perspective or approach to the pursuit. Second, these activities employ and promote a wider range of play forms, including both competitions and creative performances, highlighting freedom and creativity. Any values that emerge from play are more likely to be gained from the arts than intercollegiate athletics.

#### 4. Rethinking Play and Sport at the University

In the modern university we find play in both the academic components of the university, such as music, art, and theater, and its extracurricular activities, including these same arts and athletics. However, I have argued that the arts include far more elements of play than do intercollegiate athletics, in which play is diminished in numerous ways. Moreover, most universities do a reasonable job of providing opportunities for students from all disciplines to engage in artistic endeavors, such as choirs, theater troupes, or artistic programs. Assuming that the activities of play have important value for participants, athletics face what Randolph Feezell characterizes as a problem of distributive justice. Large amounts of money are spent on a relatively small percentage of the student body (student-athletes), and sometimes this is even subsidized by student fees.<sup>19</sup>

While I have examined intercollegiate athletics, I have not discussed other aspects of sports at the university, including physical education, intramurals, and club sports. In particular, intramural and club sports serve to make athletics more available to the student body, but in doing so they also help to return play itself to sport. Intercollegiate athletics minimize their elements of play in favor of external goods, money, or the values of the “real world.” Intramural sports are played with relatively minimal external goods at stake. They are much more likely to be played voluntarily for their own sake. Additionally, intramural sports come in a variety of forms, including traditional sports like basketball, emerging sports like ultimate Frisbee, and non-traditional sports like Wiffle ball. The significance of these forms is twofold. First, they expand the notion of play in sport, moving from the narrow conception of overcoming an opponent through physical prowess to embracing the creativity and imagination found in other forms of play. Second, these varieties allow for more players with differential skill sets. Many universities further offer intramural divisions to allow students of all talent levels and experience to play against relative equals. These divisions promote activities with varying degrees of competition and play for a wide dissemination of their values.

At most universities, intramural and club sports receive minimal attention. They are commonly organized by university recreation departments or other housing offices, many of which have other stated goals beyond the promotion of athletic participation. Even at schools with significant intramural participation, the amount of money and resources provided is relatively paltry, especially when compared to the resources afforded to intercollegiate athletics. Based on my argument, I advocate the expansion of intramural and club sports not so much for the values of athletics, but for the values of play.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See Randolph Feezell, “Branding the Role and Value of Intercollegiate Athletics,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 42, no. 2 (2015), p. 194.

<sup>20</sup> Another way to increase the presence of play would be to eliminate athletic scholarships. I cannot explore the viability of this proposal here, and it is far beyond

I am not alone in this argument; other philosophers have argued that a real commitment to the values of physical skills through sport requires increased opportunities for the entire student body through physical education courses, intramurals, or club sports.<sup>21</sup> Of course, I should note that the expansion of intramural athletic opportunities need not be done at the expense of intercollegiate athletics. However, with respect to increasing the presence of play, the impetus must be on athletics that are not of the overly competitive or scholarship variety.

The model of intramural and club sports might also be expanded to other forms of play. For instance, the arrangement of non-athletic play activities is often left to individual clubs. While student-run organizations may receive minimal funding from the university, they commonly lack the structure provided by campus recreation offices. By organizing and promoting an array of athletic and artistic organizations, the university can share the extracurricular values of play with a greater number of its students. For now, play remains in many forms throughout activities like music, art, and theater, while intercollegiate athletics, which are the primary form of athletics on campus, offer at best diminished experiences and thin forms of play.<sup>22</sup>

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the scope of this article. However, I am sympathetic to it. For two excellent discussions, see Gerdy, "Failed Experiment," and Simon, Torres, and Hager, *Fair Play*.

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Feezell, "Intercollegiate Athletics," p. 194; French, *Ethics*, p. 3; and Leslie Francis, "Title IX: Equality for Women's Sports?" *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 20, no. 1 (1993), pp. 42-43.

<sup>22</sup> I want to thank Eric Schaaf and Shawn Klein for their essential roles in helping me to think through and to develop the ideas discussed here, along with their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

