

The Ultimate Mystery: Popular Sport Beats SATs at Ranking Universities Academically

A study being released September 1 of all private national universities shows that their ranking in Ultimate Frisbee edges out both SATs and grades as a predictor of academic performance! Those ranked in the top half for Ultimate have a graduation rate of over 85%, while those in the bottom half just 60%. The top seven have nearly as many Rhodes scholars and Marshall scholars as all others combined.

Seattle, WA (PRWEB) August 31, 2006 -- Move over SATs. Incredibly, for the high-powered and high-priced private national universities, the best predictor of academic excellence is rank in a popular sport.

Whether measured by graduation rate or prestigious scholarships – the result is the same. What is this sport that mysteriously divines a university's stature so precisely? It's called Ultimate Frisbee, or more commonly just Ultimate. It is the fastest growing college sport and is already played interscholastically at over 500 colleges and universities. While wildly popular on campuses, relatively few in the wider world have even heard of it.

A study (slated for release September 1) by Dr. Michael Norden shows that among all 86 private national universities, those ranking in the top half for Ultimate have a graduation rate of over 85%, while those in the bottom half graduate just 60%. The difference in the totals of Rhodes scholars and Marshall scholars among their graduates during this decade is even more dramatic – 208 versus 15. (The odds of this happening by chance are truly infinitesimal). Moreover, the top ten schools based on Ultimate ranking have a slightly higher mean graduation rate and more winners of top scholarships than schools chosen by - not only SATs, but any standard metric including: grades, faculty resources, and financial resources.

This correlation between Ultimate and academics has previously been obscured by the fact that there are no separate divisions in Ultimate, so that smaller private universities are historically ranked together with public institutions up to an order of magnitude larger. The pattern emerges clearly when comparing, over an adequate time frame, institutions of similar size and demographics (i.e. private national universities). Study ranking is based simply on the total of Power Rating points over the past ten years (assigned by the Ultimate Players Association) for all of a school's open-division club teams.

Ultimate is a largely student-run club sport with minimal institutional support. Why a game, requiring such all-around athleticism should so consistently be dominated by universities (and presumably students) with off-the-chart academic credentials, is truly a mystery. The top seven schools for ultimate have a mean graduation rate of 95% and nearly as many total Rhodes and Marshall scholars as all of the rest combined. The names speak for themselves: Stanford, Brown, Harvard, Tufts, Dartmouth, Yale, and Princeton.

Dr. Norden is a Seattle psychiatrist and author of the book *Beyond Prozac* (Harper Collin/1995). Jeremy Norden collaborated in the study - he is a member of the world champion US National Juniors Ultimate team.

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