Magna cum laude or football–win–PARTY!?

When people consider a college for themselves or a friend or family member, two aspects of college life often quickly come to mind: academia and sports. Is it a "smart" school, a "sports" school, or something in between? Interestingly, three economists from the University of Oregon—Jason M. Lindo, Isaac D. Swenson, and Glen R. Weddell—looked at the interaction between the two.

In their paper, "Are Big-Time Sports a Threat to Student Achievement?" (National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 17677, December 2011, **www.nber.org/papers/w17677**), Oregon Duck's own looked at the change in grade point averages (GPAs) over nine fall quarters of nearly 30,000 non-athlete undergraduates enrolled at the school from 1999 to 2007, and compared the changes to the Duck's football team's win–loss record during those years.

"We find that the team's success significantly reduces male grades relative to female grades. This phenomenon is only present in fall quarters, which coincides with the football season," write the authors, who believe their research helps document a nonmonetary cost of college athletics.

Underclassmen (students who had been at the university for less than two years at the time of the survey) and student athletes were excluded from the survey because the researchers anticipated that "athletic success, if not endogenous to [an] athlete's academic performance, may interact differently with student-athlete grades."

So why is academic performance tied into the prominence of campus football more for men than for women? Could it be that women care less about their school's football program? It turns out that female students share an interest in the sport; in fact, they watch almost as many games as the men. "Only 10 percent of females and an even smaller share of males report watching zero games. Some 40 percent of females watched 10 or more games out of 12, while over 50 percent of males watched 10 or more games."

The difference in academic performance lies, however, in the drinking, tailgating, and post-win partying. The researchers found that relative to women, "men report being more likely to increase alcohol consumption, to decrease studying, and to increase partying around the success of the football team."

Yet females also report that their behavior is affected by athletic success, albeit to a lesser degree. For instance, "27 percent of females report increased partying when the team wins, versus 48 percent of men." However, while the researchers found that 24 percent of males report that athletic success either "definitely" or "probably" decreases the amount of time they spend studying, this was true for only 9 percent of the female students. So it appears that students of both genders party after a win, but the women don't let it affect their study habits as much as their male counterparts. Women's performance is likely somewhat impaired, but this effect may be "masked by the practice of grade curving," according to the study.

In addition, the researchers found that there is "pronounced heterogeneity among students, suggesting that the impact is largest among students from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds and those of relatively low ability."

These results add more fuel to the fire for the argument that, over the past 30 years, men's college attendance and completion have fallen further and further behind those of women, the researchers write. But there's more to college than just studies, right? Maybe, but that's not what your parents and teachers want to hear.

Export boom boosts Southeastern economy

During the massive recession of 2007–2009, which caused many global economies to stall, American exports fell drastically. However, in today's lackluster recovery, exports are a bright spot, making up close to half of the postrecession increase in U.S. gross domestic product (GDP). According to the U.S. Commerce Department, in 2011 alone, U.S. exports of goods and services grew almost 14 percent to a record high of $2.1 trillion. The upturn in American exports was especially strong in the Southeast. With the Southeast's merchandise exports alone having grown by more than 20 percent in 2011, exports have been a boom to the regional economy.

What caused this rise in exports in the Southeast? In her article, "Out of the South: Exports Buoy Region's Economy," (*EconSouth,* second quarter 2012, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, **www.frbatlanta.org/documents/pubs/econsouth/12q2_exports.pdf**), Lela Somoza examines the region's prosperous growth in exports.

In January 2010, the federal

government embarked on the multiagency National Export Initiative (NEI) with the ambitious goal of doubling U.S. exports of goods and services by the end of 2014. Among other things, NEI strives to increase trade advocacy, improve credit access, and remove trade barriers.

The Southeast's export boom, which has become increasingly significant to the region's economy, is being fueled by many factors. In addition to government programs such as NEI, the Southeast has a long, accessible coastline and numerous ports, making the region well-suited for exporting goods to distant ports. And increasingly, those ports are in faraway emerging markets, enabling the Southeast to fill the wants and desires of an ever-expanding foreign middle class.

Even though Canada remains the largest importer of goods from the Southeast, exports from the region to Brazil and China have been growing especially rapidly. For example, Southeastern exports to China—including transportation equipment, paper, and agricultural products—grew by more than 120 percent in 4 years to nearly $17 billion. Listed in order of the dollar value of exports, the Southeast's largest export markets in 2011 were Canada, Mexico, China, Brazil and Japan.

Besides the obvious monetary benefit to firms, exports help create and support jobs. At least 20 percent of the manufacturing jobs in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Tennessee exist because of exports. Notably, export-related jobs on average pay 13 to 18 percent more nationally than domestic-oriented industries, according to the Commerce Department.

In 2011, the top Southeastern exports were transportation equipment ($30.6 billion), chemicals ($28.7 billion), petroleum and coal products ($23.5 billion), computer and electronic products ($22.7 billion), and agricultural products ($21.3 billion).

Within the transportation equipment industry (which includes the manufacturing of automobiles), excess plant capacity, currency exchange rates, and free trade agreements have attracted automobile makers, including foreign auto manufacturers Kia Motors, Nissan, and Volkswagen, to build plants in the region. Between 2007 and 2011, exports of transportation equipment increased almost 33 percent. It is expected that auto exports will be boosted further by the elimination of tariffs by the March 2012 South Korea–U.S. Free Trade Agreement.

Additionally, Southeastern agricultural products such as cotton, soybeans, wheat, and rice—although no longer the region's main commerce—accounted for almost 30 percent of total U.S. agricultural exports in 2011.

Although goods make up the bulk of U.S. exports, service exports are an important portion of the total, with a major component being travel purchases (such as food, lodging, admissions, and shopping). The Southeast region of the United States has become a beacon to international travelers because of its mild climate; proximity to Central and South America and Canada; tourist destinations; and shopping. In 2010, Florida was second only to New York in attracting these tourists, with Brazilians especially flocking to the "Sunshine State" to buy clothes, shoes, and electronics at favorable exchange rates.

While travel exports declined during the recent recession, foreign visitors—traditionally greater than half from Canada and Mexico but more and more from South America and Asia—have surged to the United States, causing travel exports to account for a fifth of U.S. total service exports. South Florida's foreign visitors especially come from Canada, Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina.

Somoza closes by questioning whether the Southeast can maintain its export momentum; she touches on possible political and economic ramifications (such as the eurozone crisis) and, conversely, on the possibility of growth in vast, untapped markets. The latter is an interesting point, as she notes that only 1 percent of American companies export their goods, while 95 percent of the world's consumers live outside the United States—and are, thus, prime export targets. □