

Coach for College

D U K E U N I V E R S I T Y

A Global Initiative to Promote Higher Education Through Sports

The Case for Coach for College:

How American Student-Athletes and Vietnamese Middle School Students Can Help Each Other





US student-athletes team with Vietnamese college students to teach middle school youth math, science, physics and English, integrating sports examples into the lessons.

Executive Summary

The increasing pressure on college athletes to perform at the highest levels has led to college experiences that are dominated by the practice and play of sports. The singular nature of the college athletic experience risks leaving student-athletes isolated, particularly from issues that affect people in less privileged circumstances such as those in the rural parts of developing countries, and without a life purpose once their athletic careers come to an end. Coach for College gives student-athletes a new start to the rest of their lives: they learn to build bridges with former opponents or stereotyped groups, they become aware of the challenges the poor face to obtain even the basic necessities of life, they become more grateful for the opportunities and resources that have fueled success in their own lives. Above all, they see that the skills and lessons they have learned from sports have left them with many ways to make a difference in the world, a realization that propels them to increased community service and dedicated careers as public servants whose work contributes to the betterment of their own and other societies.

The Problems Facing College Athletics and American Universities

The life of the college student-athlete is one of focus and discipline. Practices often last three to four hours, sometimes twice a day; in addition to practices, student-athletes are expected to adhere to strict strength and conditioning regimens. During seasons, games and tournaments often last several days and require out-of-town travel and significant absences from classes.

The risk, however, is that student-athletes become too one-dimensional. Sports have become so all-consuming that many student-athletes spend their remaining time in college simply trying to get by academically. Student-athletes rarely study abroad, and report that they do not have the time or the avenues to participate in service projects that require deep engagement with their local communities, much less in foreign countries. At Duke University, only about 2.5% of student-athletes (14-15 people) are able to participate in the DukeEngage program each year, a program which offers 8-10 week civic engagement experiences to Duke students during the summers. This lack of participation in meaningful civic engagement and cultural immersion experiences separates and isolates American student-athletes from the life and experience of a typical college student in a way that negatively impacts themselves and their universities.

Moreover, the majority of college athletes' close friends tend to be other college athletes, and in particular, members of their own team. Consequently, they may have little awareness of problems faced by those in



Academic lessons alternate with sports classes throughout the day. During the camps, each youth learns basketball, tennis, volleyball and soccer.

developing countries and/or may lack a deep understanding of the practices and beliefs of people from other cultures and backgrounds different than their own. Having been so focused on sports during college, as well as in the 10-15 years prior, a large number of athletes have not thought deeply about what kinds of interests or careers they could pursue after college that would provide them with the same fulfillment and sense of accomplishment that athletics has. While the vast majority will not become professional sports players, a large proportion of these nevertheless report being unsure of what they would like to do after college graduation. Thus, despite their tremendous talents, including the life skills they have learned through playing competitive sports, student-athletes are a group at risk of not fulfilling their potential once they leave their college campuses, and of not achieving the outcomes today's universities desire for their students.

Increasingly, universities are recognizing the value of civic engagement and of giving students opportunities to apply knowledge gained in academic classes to solve real world problems that benefit people in need, particularly in an international setting. A greater priority needs to be placed on involving student-athletes in these types of experiences.

The Coach for College Program

Based on her own experiences as a college student-athlete, and her subsequent involvement in psychology research, Parker Goyer, a former Duke tennis player, has designed a program called Coach for College to address the needs of student-athletes while also helping youth in developing countries. The program is three weeks in length, which can accommodate student-athletes' training schedules and summer school requirements. Student-athletes serve alongside other student-athletes from their own and other universities to teach sports, academics, and life skills to rural middle school youth, currently in Vietnam. The curriculum uses sports as a central theme, such that all topics student-athletes are required to teach are ones with which they are intimately familiar. Student-athletes teach with bilingual Vietnamese college students, who help them understand the culture and who help the kids understand what the student-athletes teach. For the inexperienced traveler, travel abroad, especially to a developing country, can seem scary. Particularly in a service context, people fear they cannot offer anything of value. However, student-athletes see Coach for College as a feasible way to start their journey on this path. For many student-athletes who have never been out of the country before, and who have spent the vast majority of their time in athletic practices and competitions, the kind of experience offered by Coach for College provides appropriate levels of support to mitigate the challenges, along with design features that suit their needs. Thus Coach for College is taken up by people who may not normally participate in standard study abroad or civic engagement programs offered by universities.



The kids take part every day in a life skills session, where the college students teach them about the value of teamwork, discipline, setting ambitious goals, how to overcome obstacles and other life lessons they have learned as student-athletes.

Stronger Relationships with Members of Outgroups

During Coach for College students are immersed in rural communities, teaching local middle school students for eight hours a day and engaging in lesson planning with fellow college students at night. The intensity and shared nature of the experience forms bonds which many athletes say are stronger than any they have ever experienced before, resulting in the most unlikely of friendships. Bridges are formed between formerly fierce athletic rivals (e.g., athletes from Duke and UNC, one of the strongest athletic rivalries in the nation) and between members of countries formerly at war (America and Vietnam). Alex Kenley, a diver at UNC who participated in the program in summer 2009, describes the bonds that were formed in his camp:

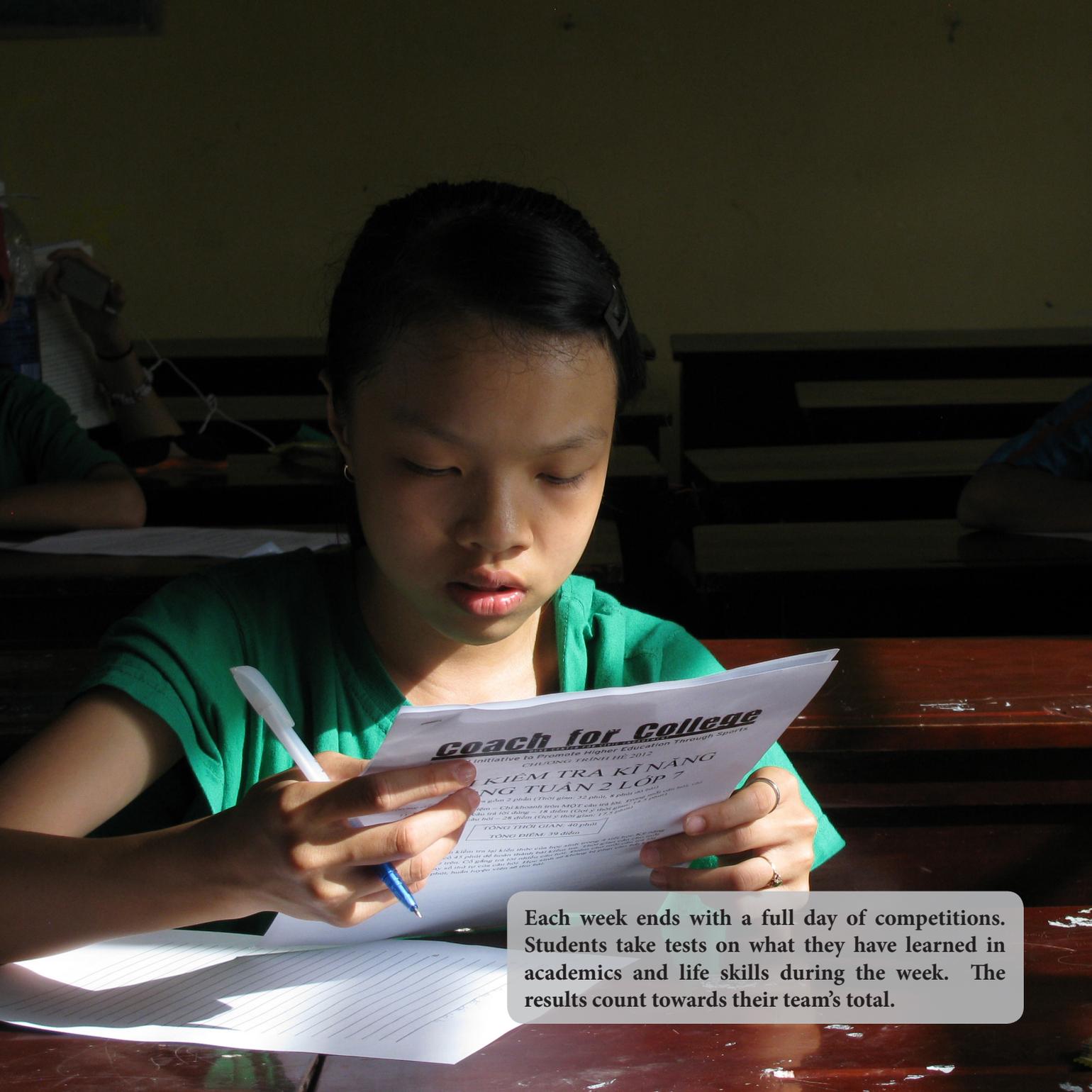
Because the Americans were thrown so far out of our comfort zones, we developed a deep bond that has not left, even though our program ended over two years ago. In the 28 months since the program has ended, I have seen each of the American members of my group. I have been to Virginia Tech for a soccer game, Duke for a field hockey game and UNC for tennis matches and fencing meets. One year after the program, six of us got together for a reunion weekend in Chicago to visit our American Director, who was attending grad school there at the time. One of the coaches is now pursuing a PhD in educational psych as a result of her participation in Coach for College.

Jessica Wacker, a fencer at UNC, called the experience of watching her team of Vietnamese students win first place in the Coach for College camp “her favorite sports memory at UNC”, even more than seeing UNC win the NCAA Men’s Basketball Championship. She served as the director of Alex’s camp, and more than three years after her first experience as a participant in summer 2008, expresses similar feelings about the relationships formed:

I am still friends with all of the UNC, Duke and Virginia Tech Student Athletes from my program. They have become some of my closest friends. We talk every week and trash-talk before UNC-Virginia Tech football games. We also visit each other frequently and celebrate life changes (graduations, new jobs and marriages). This program is about building bridges --- from the United States to Vietnam, from Vietnamese students to access higher education and from ACC rivals to life-long friendships.

Ned Crotty, a member of the 2006 Duke lacrosse team which was the target of the Duke lacrosse scandal, was the leading scorer in the nation during college and has earned the same honors as a professional lacrosse player. He participated in summer 2008, the program’s first year. For him, the friendships were similarly profound:

I loved meeting the people from the other school [UNC] and it was great to get to know people from my



Each week ends with a full day of competitions. Students take tests on what they have learned in academics and life skills during the week. The results count towards their team's total.

school. [Normally] I never would have talked to two of the people [who were on other sports teams] at school whom I got to know. Literally, within days, I was friends with people I would never have been friends with before. Within three weeks I became really close with all of them.

More surprising still are the bonds that are formed between American college athletes and Vietnamese middle school students who do not speak English. Alex Kenley met a high school student named Thien, who even after the program emailed him and called his cell phone multiple times per week. Alex has vowed to pay for the rest of Thien's high school and college education. Through Facebook and Skype, Alex and Thien have maintained consistent contact over the past several years. Despite all the coaches he has had over the course of his athletic career, Kyle McCartan, a golfer at Boston College, calls a Vietnamese sixth grader named Linh his best one. Even though Kyle was teaching ninth grade students during CFC, he met Linh because Linh had come to the camp a month early in his excitement to participate.

Linh and I formed a deep relationship. I enjoyed his practical jokes and embraced him as my new coach. I told him that if he wanted to be a part of our program that I was going to put him to work. He loved it. He followed me around all day helping me prepare for my next activity. I would say Linh "bong ro" and he would head over to the equipment room and pick up the bag of basketballs. He buzzed about as he set up cones with me and then after he enthusiastically cleaned up. Secondly, he knew that after clean up he would be able to carry my backpack up to the morality classroom. Also, he would always fill up my water bottle before each activity. I thought this was stellar as he kept me hydrated. I later found out a week later as we were sitting in my morality class together that my water bottle had become Linh's water bottle after he naturally grabbed it and took a huge swig. He saw me as family and family members share everything they have in Vietnam. I admired that in Linh. Linh reminded me of the strength of relationships, especially family relationships.

Haley Hemm, a UNC tennis player who participated in summer 2011, describes the purity of these relationships with the Vietnamese middle school students:

Moments like this in Vietnam made me realize that communication is so much more than verbal. I could maybe speak one hundred Vietnamese words or phrases by the end of my trip, but that did not matter. I could communicate with my eyes, my hands, my smile, my enthusiasm and energy. The relationships I developed with the 8th grade boys and girls were probably some of the most honest and pure relationships I have developed because language was not there to muddle them up. I would bring my enthusiasm, over exaggeration, loud voice, crazy arm motions and dance moves to the tennis court and the English classroom and in return the kids would bring me their utmost attention, gratitude, love of learning, effort, personalities and homemade grass and flower jewelry everyday.



The teams also compete against each other in each sport to conclude the week. The scores from academics, life skills and athletics determine the team's final position at the end of the camp.

Consciousness Raising Through Experiential Learning

Student-athletes report that the direct, hands-on experience the program provides makes poverty and relevant life lessons tangible, allowing issues read in textbooks to come to life and formerly nameless faces to become real people with distinct personalities. Student-athletes experience far more of the country and the people than they ever would as a tourist, who are typically confined to the major cities where Western conveniences are readily available. As Gladys Manzur, a fencer at UNC, describes,

I think CFC allowed me to witness and experience an area of the world that remains largely out-of-reach. I was especially glad to interact with this foreign place in a meaningful way by coaching the children. The experience went beyond a perfunctory one, a tourist trip. I was able to have meaningful connections with the people of Vietnam.

While poverty in the news or in a textbook can be pushed aside as an abstract or vague notion, it cannot be ignored when students experience the same conditions themselves, and see the potential and positive attitude of people forced by the circumstances of their birth to live in such conditions. For the time they are there, student-athletes truly feel what it is like to live in these communities as they experience the same struggles and frustrations that the local citizens endure on a daily basis. Ashley Seldon, a Virginia Tech soccer player from the 2009 program, describes her encounter with the everyday realities in Vietnam:

Throughout the three weeks I spent in Vietnam I believe that I learned a remarkable amount of things about the culture, language, and challenges. I am positive that there is so much more that I have to learn and I can only hope that I get a chance to, but comparing my knowledge before & after the trip shows an exponential change! The program allowed for me to learn about the actual hardships and obstacles that the people of Vietnam endure on a day to day basis. Of course I knew going into the program that the children didn't have as much as us and their lives were very different from ours, but actually getting to spend a lot of time getting to know them, seeing where and how they lived, and speaking with the Vietnamese college students showed me how things REALLY are.

Gratitude, Decreased Materialism, and Greater Sense of Life Priorities

American student-athletes describe the children in the program as some of the happiest they have seen, despite the fact that their families have an income of \$200-\$300 per year from farming. Some student-athletes noted that in their lives in the U.S. they spend this amount of money in a few trips to the grocery store. Seeing evidence of happiness despite low material wealth is a powerful lesson for the student-athletes. Despite being from rival universities and participating in different CFC camps, Clemson rower Brittany Burns, NC State runner Erika Alpeter, Duke lacrosse player Christie Barnes, and UNC swimmer



A key to the camps is to create an atmosphere that makes learning fun. Using sports examples to show the relevancy of lessons and tying all aspects to the camp-long team competition motivates and engages the children.

Katie Keel came to the same conclusion after their experience, that less is more. As Katie Keel explains,

Sometimes I find myself becoming caught up in this comfortable lifestyle and stressing or worrying about small problems that seem “insurmountable” at the time. It’s situations like these where I catch myself and remember my experience in Vietnam. Many of the [kids] didn’t even own a pair of shoes and most lived in small huts with only two rooms. Simple things we take for granted such as clean water, refrigeration and air conditioning were nowhere to be found, and yet, these kids smile as if they’ve won the lottery. What’s their secret? Less is more. I find in our society today, the focus is solely on what you don’t have but need or what you must have to be happy. Call it consumerism or effective advertising, but our society’s mindset is that we can never have enough. Well, in Vietnam, these kids have nothing (by our standards) yet they’re supremely happy. They have found what it means to be truly happy and that is a lesson I will never forget. This trip, in a nutshell, changed my frame of mind from thinking about what I DIDN’T have in my life to truly appreciating what I DID have. I’m truly blessed in so many ways and the Coach for College experience taught me how to appreciate those blessings and gave me the drive to use what I do have to benefit others.

The program helps student-athletes to develop a larger perspective, to see that they can get by living on the bare necessities and even be happy doing so. They learn they have many things in common with people they previously were suspicious about, and by their own admission, had a tendency to stereotype. Two years after the lacrosse scandal that plagued his team, Duke men’s lacrosse player Michael Catalino found a new perspective in Vietnam:

I can’t say that I did know a lot about the Vietnamese culture before I decided to go Vietnam, but the sad part was, I didn’t care to. I was so caught up in my own business that I did not even think to consider those who are not privileged with million dollar practice facilities and sports stardom, if my team even had any of these, I was taking them for granted. Going to Vietnam made me consider those less fortunate and will not let me forget what I experienced. It made me examine my life as a student-athlete. My experience in Vietnam taught me something profound. The moment you begin to think that you have nothing else to learn, you are further from understanding than you even realize. The wild part is that I did not realize what I had learned until years later, as not a year goes by where I don’t reflect on my experience with Coach For College in Vietnam and how it changed me.

The experience was even powerful enough to help student-athletes overcome personal tragedy. The day Miami baseball player and 2011 CFC participant Tom Powers left the U.S. for Vietnam was the seventh anniversary of his dad’s death, which he calls “the worst day of his life.” He entered Vietnam with a profound sadness as he remembered this event. Once at CFC Tom was one of the best teachers in his camp; he was even nominated to serve as camp director when the original director fell ill. By the end, he had convinced his students, resigned to become farmers like their parents, to dare to be lawyers, entrepreneurs, police officers, and engineers. When it was time for him and the other coaches to go back to America, his students formed a line in front of the bus, preventing it from leaving. They had taken his lesson of standing

For many Coach for College participants, the relationships developed with the children go much deeper than they anticipated. They return home with a new awareness of the impact they can have on those around them and a desire to continue serving others.



up for what you believe in to heart, and were now applying it in their own lives. Tom now wants to be a human rights and immigration lawyer, to help the people he met in Vietnam obtain the same rights and freedoms he has had, and seeks to help some of his CFC students one day enter an American university. His experience in Coach for College was a “revelation” that allowed him to understand what he wanted to do with his life. He is currently learning Vietnamese, and speaks by Skype daily with a Vietnamese college student he met in the program, Tran Uyen Nguyen.

Katie Keel also lost her father before participating in the program:

Though I tried my hardest to impact the [kids’] lives and encourage them to further their education, it was me who really received the lesson. These kids taught me that less really is more. Earlier that year, before I left for CFC, my father suddenly passed away. I was devastated, and struggled with depression and indescribable grief. I found that, although I was at one of the best universities in the country, I had trouble appreciating what opportunities were in front of me. I was only able to focus on the negatives in my life, and specifically, what was missing from it- my dad. What I learned in Vietnam was that you don’t have to have everything to be happy. I had lost the one person I was closest to, but these kids showed me that I have so many other things to be grateful for.

Claire Crippen, a swimmer at UVA, came to Coach for College in July 2011 after her brother tragically passed away while swimming in the FINA 10K World Cup in October 2010:

After my brother passed away, I stopped and I thought about what I really wanted to do, and I realized I really wanted to give back to the community somehow, and when I learned about a program called Coach for College, I thought that I wasn’t going to be mentally prepared to go to a foreign country, a third world country, for a month by myself, and it wasn’t until one of my best friends who I went to high school with at Germantown Academy got me into this program [that I decided to go]. It was an experience in Vietnam that I will never forget. There’s not a day in my life that goes by without thinking about these little kids in Vietnam who have so little, and for us to see how we impacted their lives firsthand, and see how we changed them forever, it was a humbling experience that I will never forget for the rest of my life.

Increased Self-Efficacy Towards Service

One real risk for programs that utilize foreign (especially American) volunteers internationally is that the volunteers have few skills that can tangibly make a difference in places with a different language, culture, and political system than the one in America. At worst, they may do busy work such as printing or copying, and at best, they may produce an output, such as a curriculum or site assessment, but never really know whether they had any long-term impact on the communities where they worked. There are also few



On weekends, coaches take part in cultural excursions to local sites, where their Vietnamese colleagues help them experience new aspects of Vietnamese life from an inside perspective.

chances to return to the same communities year after year, and track kids' progress over time.

In contrast, Coach for College invests deeply in partner communities. Many people involved in the program, American and Vietnamese alike, describe Coach for College as a “family.” The program is held at the same schools from year to year; expansion to new sites does not replace programming at old sites. Each summer, student-athletes build on the work of the student-athletes from the previous summer, as kids participate in the CFC camps multiple times (up to a maximum of four times). Student-athletes who return as camp directors are able to see the kids they worked with as coaches; the prospect of seeing some of the same student-athletes again is a source of inspiration for the middle school students. Separate statistical analyses have revealed that the program is reducing the middle school dropout rate in rural Vietnam and encouraging kids to strive for goals that before they never thought possible. Once the middle school students complete their education, we hope to hire them as staff members who can administer the program for the next generation of middle school students in their community. Student-athletes come to feel they are making a significant contribution to a cause that is larger than themselves, imbuing them with a new sense of purpose.

At a basic level, sports expertise gives college athletes something tangible to contribute to youth in a foreign country. Sports, which college athletes have lived and breathed for the better part of their lives, is a universal language, which people from any country and culture can enjoy. Moreover, sports can attract youth in the most remote parts of a developing country, who cannot be reached by other means, to take precious time away from family chores and part-time jobs to come to school in the summer to learn. Additionally, despite growing up in much wealthier communities thousands of miles away, American student-athletes find they still have life experiences they can draw upon to help rural Vietnamese youth. UVA rower Betsy Nilan recounts that when she told her students about winning the NCAA Rowing Championship and getting to go to the White House and meet President Obama, one of her students, Canh, immediately stood up and wanted to shake her hand. Shaking her hand was to him, by extension, shaking President Obama's hand. Betsy said she could tell that from that moment on Canh was determined to make something like that happen in his own life. Virginia Tech runner Devin Cornwall had a similar influence on a student named Dien. During the first week of the camp, Dien had told the coaches he was confident he would not go on to college because he needed to help his family in the rice paddies. At the end of the camp, as Devin was about to leave, he began to cry, and using a Vietnamese coach to translate, told Devin through his tears that he would try as hard as he could to study in order to go to college, and would not give up until he made it.

With so many obstacles --- a different language, culture, climate, and living conditions, not to mention



Each camp is taught by 8 US student-athletes and 8 Vietnamese college students. They spend the 3 weeks rooming together, coaching, planning lessons, and discover by the end that they have formed lasting friendships. For many, learning to live and work together with someone from such a different background is an unexpected source of growth and learning.

societal constraints making higher education elusive for the youth --- it would be easy for the American student-athletes to come away from the experience feeling they had not contributed much to the people they were trying to help. Instead, athletes come away with an enhanced sense of optimism in the power of service, and in their own ability to make a difference in the lives of others. Coach for College gives student-athletes numerous and significant opportunities to achieve positive outcomes, the results of which student-athletes can observe directly during their three weeks in Vietnam. They report being able to get girls initially reluctant to play sports to such a level of proficiency, enthusiasm, and confidence that they are leading their teams in sports competitions by the end. They are able to teach kids who had never played sports before how to perform specific skills well, such as serving a tennis ball over the net, giving the kids a sense of efficacy and confidence that can carry over into academics. They are able to help students deal with disappointment and loss, such as when their team fails to win first place. They help students learn how to work together as a team and resolve conflicts that inevitably emerge. They help students set goals, become more confident in their own opinions, participate more actively in class, and in some cases, improve their scores dramatically on tests of academic knowledge during the course of the camp. Madison Vain, a Wake Forest volleyball player, was able to teach several lessons during Coach for College:

Athletically, I felt like I really taught the kids the rules of volleyball in such a way that they can now play it so much better. I also felt incredibly proud when I could take a child from practically missing the ball every try to finally getting a serve over the net. Personally, I remember the day we were talking with the kids about setting goals and my entire class said they wanted to be ___ (whatever their dream was) and then finished the sentence with “but my family can’t afford it” and we sat and talked for a while to let that be less of a hurdle. But one girl said she wanted to be a doctor and started crying...when I went to sit with her she told me she wanted to be a doctor because her mother was sick and she wanted to help. It broke my heart but then we got to talk[ing] about our families and how we were all going to be alright no matter what happened. As a cancer survivor myself, I really felt like I was in the right moment to guide her through wanting to talk about a very serious sickness.

Increased Concern for Others

The combination of seeing their own ability to make a difference, and seeing firsthand the potential of kids whose poverty and societal structures do not afford them the same resources and opportunities they themselves have had, inspires many American athletes to do more to help others once they return to the U.S. For some, this is manifested as increased social responsibility. They tell their friends and family about the challenges people in rural Vietnam face to obtain even basic necessities. They think carefully before complaining or throwing something away. They think about what possessions they have that they don’t really need which can be given to those who are less fortunate. They look for more opportunities to



Near the end of camp, coaches visit the homes of some of the children. It is one of the highlights of the summer for the Americans to see where their kids live and how they come to school each day. For the Vietnamese it is a thrill to become the hosts and teachers for a day.

volunteer in their local communities, as NC State runner Erika Alpeter did:

Since I have returned I also have realized I didn't want to stop teaching kids! I have connected myself with a group that tutors middle school students from a nearby school that are on free or reduced lunches. On Thursdays I help tutor these kids. This is without a doubt a direct result from my experience with the children in Vietnam.

Perhaps the most significant life change occurred for David Eitel, a Duke fencer who majored in electrical engineering and computer science. Initially, he was skeptical about attending the program:

I remember attending an info session and thinking that this program seemed very far outside of my comfort zone. Going to a developing foreign country half-way across the world to coach children seemed like an unusual way to spend three weeks of one's precious summer. During previous summers I hadn't done anything remotely similar to this aside from a family vacation to China. Before I visited Vietnam for the first time as part of the Coach for College program I hadn't participated in many service-related activities. I had never found them particularly engaging and mainly participated for "credit" for a National Honor Society or some other commitment that required X number of hours of community service.

While participating in Vietnam in summer 2008, he learned to embrace the Vietnamese culture and became great friends with his fellow Vietnamese coaches, finding they had similar temperaments and senses of humor to his own. For the next year, he corresponded regularly with three of them, Luong, Nam, and Phuong, using up several international calling cards. They became some of his closest friends, leading him to want to return to Vietnam.

He decided to spend his next vacation in Vietnam. On a trip back to the rural community where he served, he was met by 15 of the students he had taught during the previous summer, all wearing their Coach for College T-shirts. When he came to the city where the Vietnamese college students lived, someone arranged a dinner with every single Vietnamese coach from his camp.

I was astonished to see everyone again, let alone at a single dinner table no less. No one had ever done anything like that for me ever before except for family members for birthday dinners. It felt really good to know that the bond created by Coach for College was strong and had survived a year.

Still not satiated with Vietnam, he returned for a third time after his college graduation:

During the subsequent school year, I started planning a trip for after graduation. I also learned about the



Good byes on the last day of camp bring tears for both college students and kids. It is a hard, emotional day, but one that leaves a long-lasting imprint on all involved, as they realize at a deep level how much people they had not met a few weeks before, now mean to them.

American Director position for CFC. Although I wanted to start my job soon after graduating/traveling, I felt that I needed to be involved in CFC once again. I enjoyed traveling a lot the previous summer and seeing my friends. However, I realized I also wanted to help the children again if at all possible. This is a very interesting change in behavior for me. Two years before this, I would not have even considered the thought of volunteering multiple times in Vietnam to help kids. I think I would have literally laughed if someone had told me that I was going to happily visit Vietnam several times, live in a research center with limited facilities, and wake up early every day to teach kids.

Refinement of Career Plans

After seeing the power of service activities firsthand through Coach for College, some student-athletes decide to dedicate significant periods of their lives to these pursuits. Often those who leave the program with service-related life plans were among the most unlikely candidates for such plans in the beginning. Anna Roberts, who played softball at UNC, said there was not much time for international travel during college because the softball season was year round:

I had never been to Asia, and quite frankly, if asked to point out Vietnam on a map I would not have been able to do so. As I filled out the CFC application I realized how little of my time I had committed to community service activities.

Participating in CFC in summer 2010 transformed her world view and commitment to service. She returned to Vietnam in summer 2011 as a camp director and is currently participating in the Peace Corps:

CFC in 2010 opened my eyes to the education problem in Southern Vietnam. When I saw I had the opportunity to come back, I grabbed it immediately because these kids mean so much to me. After returning from the program I would get monthly calls (granted at 5 AM my time) from a bunch of my students still trying to impress me with their English. When I saw how appreciative these people were for our help, my commitment level increased heavily, leading me to apply for the Peace Corps. (My nomination is to teach English in Asia starting Jan 2012).

Before participating in Coach for College in summer 2009, UNC swimmer Andy Brake had never been out of the country before. Nevertheless, during CFC he was able to excel at bridging the gap between the American college athletes and their Vietnamese teaching partners. He returned to Coach for College as a camp director in summer 2010 and subsequently made it a goal to apply for the Peace Corps. Ultimately he wants to go into non-profit consulting work to help programs like Coach for College. He is currently



For many student-athletes, their experience is so meaningful that they return for a second summer as team leaders to be able to see their children again and to help a new group of participants maximize their impact in Vietnam.

completing his first year in the Peace Corps in Liberia, from which he wrote:

I know I can't be any help to CFC in my present location and work but I can say a big part of where I am now is because of CFC. [As part of Peace Corps] I live in a small village of 500 people close to Sierra Leone and work at a government high school. Living and working in the rural area presents enormous challenges. Honestly, where we were in Vietnam is significantly more developed than most of Liberia. My experience in Vietnam served as a stepping stone to the challenges that I face here working in rural Liberia. CFC showed me I could have a positive impact on people in different cultures and cross boundaries I never knew were there. Even though the experience of CFC is only a short four weeks I believe it will live with everyone who participates in it for the rest of their lives; coaches, students, and directors.

Two student-athletes subsequently volunteered in Africa after their experience with Coach for College. According to Duke swimmer Kirstie Jeffrey,

Coach for College got me deeply involved in education reform and prompted me to teach in Africa the following summer. [In Africa] I not only wrote and archived lesson plans but I created an instructional video that was distributed in the Ministry of Education in Africa that can be further used to enhance teachers' curriculum when we are not there. We had to assess every lesson we did in the classrooms and select the best ones to show as a future example. Furthermore, I am writing my distinction thesis on education reform in context with culture and existing resources.

After graduation Kirstie joined Teach for America, where she continues to serve those in underprivileged communities, relying on teaching skills she initially gained in CFC.

Lauren Prussing, a UNC volleyball player who participated in the first program in 2008, describes her subsequent decision to volunteer in another country this way:

Armed with that commitment, I decided that I was going to fulfill a long-time dream of mine to volunteer in Africa for a few months after graduation. I credit Coach for College as a key contributor that gave me the courage to follow through with that dream. Both in Kenya and Tanzania, I again witnessed how sport was positively affecting the communities I lived in and became convinced of its power to help change the world.

Now 24 years old, she says her experience in Coach for College has led her to reconsider goals she formerly rejected. She said the program helped her realize what made her truly happy. She is currently applying to graduate programs in Public Health and is looking to have a career in sport for development.

Becca Ward, a Duke fencer who won two bronze medals at the 2008 Olympics, said her participation in

Coach for College in summer 2012 helped her to refine her career plans in a dramatic way:

I don't think I have ever felt like I was exactly in the right place before. I have always had drive and energy, but for the first time [in Coach for College] I felt focused and that what I was doing was both the right thing to do, and the right thing for me. Knowing that feeling, and that it stems from working so directly with people and kids, made me redefine what I want out of my career and my life. Before [the CFC] camp, I had always debated between environmental policy and educational policy. CFC has pushed me towards working directly with people and the importance of opportunity within communities. Working with such motivated and talented kids made that choice a lot easier for me. After this camp, I see how much I've taken the ability to get an education for granted. I want to help make that a reality for more kids...I know now that I will get ultimately more fulfillment from directly helping people and trying to provide opportunities and facilitate improvements in communities. I have never felt like I was doing the right thing at the right time as much as I did at camp. I want to continue making a difference in my life and I can't think of a better way than helping children reach their full potential.

Outlook

Coach for College has been a relatively small program to date, serving 170 athletes, each members of one of the 12 ACC universities. The dynamics of college athletics are the same throughout the country, especially at the Division I level. On average, all student-athletes face some of the same issues – difficulty of combining athletic training with study abroad and community service, uncertainty of post-graduation plans, a narrow perspective created by a close-knit circle of like-minded friends and family members and elite treatment as a college athlete in a society where hard work is largely rewarded with success. For Coach for College to affect campus culture, large numbers of student-athletes need to participate, both at the level of individual universities and at the level of the nation as a whole. To the extent that college athletes can become transformed, others will be transformed as well. College athletes are popular role models whom kids admire and upon whom the wider public often focuses their hopes and dreams. They can help everyday Americans who may never travel outside the country, or who may see Vietnam only through the lens of war, seek to understand and find common ground with people from different cultures and ways of living. They can go into the most remote regions of the world, out of the reach of formal American diplomacy, and establish warmth and trust with people who may never have met Americans before, or who may view America in a negative light.

Moreover, Coach for College is a program that is adaptable and replicable. The program model and curriculum have been refined over four years, interweaving material from the local education system in Vietnam with the principles of American sports. The schedule, the equipment, and the curriculum can be

brought to any school in Vietnam, and with some adaptation, to schools in other countries. Coach for College provides a common cause which forces interaction and cooperation between people who otherwise would have no reason to meet: American college athletes who compete as opponents on the athletic fields, college students of Vietnamese universities, middle school students from communities of the rural poor. The motivation to bridge divides and work for the goals underlying the program inspires participants to go to extraordinary lengths to help each other and in the process to help themselves. Determined to help the middle school students overcome the limitations of their environment, American and Vietnamese college students spend hours at night and in the early morning reviewing lesson plans so that they can give the middle school students the best teaching that is possible. Seeking to please and show respect to their college student coaches, middle school students who endure tough conditions in one-room wooden houses and part-time jobs in swamps and rice fields come to school during the summer and sit through hours of difficult academic material that they are not supposed to learn until the next school year. The experience stays with middle school and college students years after participation, informing how they will spend the rest of their lives. For college athletes, the cost of participation is a fraction of the cost of their college education, yet many point to Coach for College as their most life changing experience to date. Given substantial investment, Coach for College can become a significant international movement, changing college athletics, American universities, and America's image abroad for the better.



www.coachforcollege.org