

**Like in the movies?
Giving a voice to
international female student-athletes
at American universities**

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: combine athletics and academics



: skilled athletes and spots to fill

- About 20,000 international student-athletes (F + M); 5-10% of all (NCAA, 2018)
- International students about 5.3% of all (IIE, 2017)

Division I Women's Sports			
	2010	2017	% change
FIELD HOCKEY	42	101	140%
BASKETBALL	67	135	101%
SWIMMING	84	151	80%
TRACK	130	229	76%
ROWING	53	92	74%
SOFTBALL	130	221	70%
GOLF	95	151	59%
TENNIS	268	376	40%
CROSS COUNTRY	63	82	30%
VOLLEYBALL	62	73	18%
ICE HOCKEY	77	80	4%

NCAA, 2018

Select a Division

Divisions I and II

Select Minimum # of Student-Athletes

0

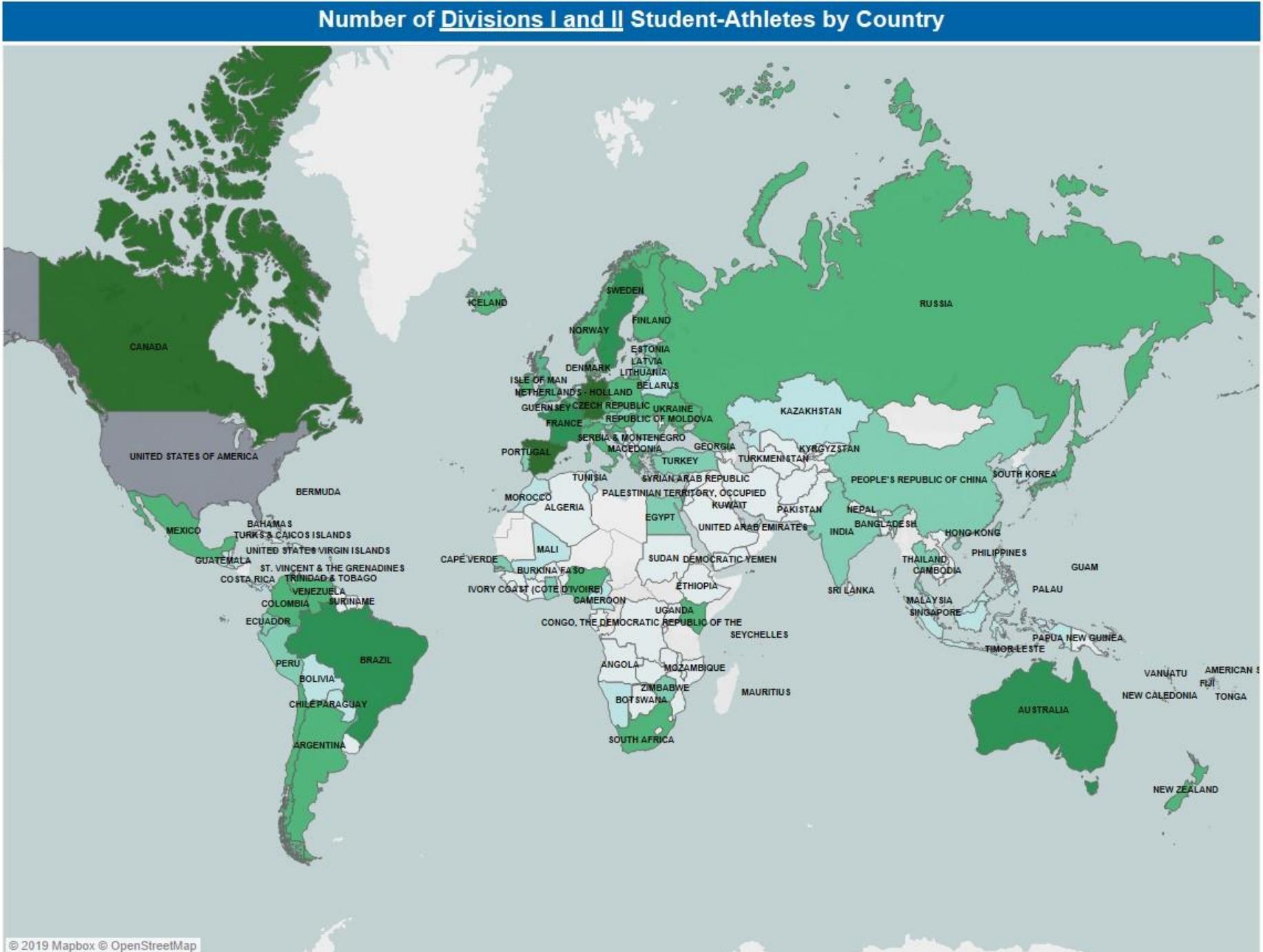
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Number of Student-Athletes

- 1-10
 - 11-50
 - 51-100
 - 101-500
 - 501-1,000
 - 1,001-5,000
 - 5,000+

Number of Divisions I and II Student-Athletes by Country

Divisions I and II student-athletes by country (AY 2017-18)



, 2019

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Note: Data for all student-athletes who participated in 2017-18. U.S. territories are included.

[Download the dataset here](#)

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- In-depth, semi-structured interviews ($n = 1-3$)
- Twenty-two international undergraduate st.
 - 16 countries, four continents
 - Five public D-I institutions, four conferences
 - Nine sports
- Four themes:
 - Limited knowledge
 - “Opportunity”
 - Social circle
 - Personal cost

Limited knowledge

- Academic institution:
 - *I looked at some picture, but not really. I basically just came. I remember it was the Sunday before school started...I didn't know anything [shrugs her shoulders and smiles]...I just came...I was pretty lucky because, when I look back, I really didn't know anything.*
 - *I was very uneducated. Your prospective coach isn't going to say "we are here, but all these other programs are better than us!"*
 - *[Coaches] had spoken about the girls, "yeah we have a lot of height on the team; you'll be adding to that"...I am a head taller than most of the girls. (...) It is very easy to deceive an international athlete.*

Like in the movies

- *When I was small, I was always watching movies about America and how it's a perfect life here and how it's all dreams come true here...*
- *I also had this picture about the US from the media and movies and it was just a big thing.*
- *The image that I had about America was mainly through movies. Seriously, you see movies and you think, "so, that's America!" and then you come here and you see ... So some of the things there are true.*

- *The trainer is there to communicate all our problems with the coach and we don't have a voice. If I tell the coach what is wrong, she says "you don't have a medical degree...you don't know what's going wrong...I have a PhD in whatever, and I know everything ..."*
- Student suffers an issue mid-practice and the coach asks, *what is happening? "I have had eight doctor appointments and I've been talking with the trainer and I'm wearing this monitor... How can you not know what is happening?"*
Big adjustment not having that straight communication.
The doctor should diagnose and the trainer should treat – we are meant to go there (to the trainer) and say 'I have a problem, I'd like to see a doctor' however, she won't let you.

Opportunity

- Free university education...**Even for students where higher education is free or there is only nominal tuition**
- Also, to continue combining athletic and academic pursuits
- **Important for national policy-makers**

Social circle

- *We have, other people, from our part of...everybody that speaks our language, we have meals sometimes.*
- [Track athlete:] *I am friends with the whole basketball team [note: 50% international] and the whole tennis team [100% international]*

Hidden “opportunity cost”

- No peer/professorial network in the country of origin
- Not socialized into the local system
- Similar to expats (e.g., in multi-national companies)

Take-aways

- Personal—and societal—cost
- More, better opportunities to facilitate the pursuit of athletic **and** academic paths?
- Short-term → long-term migrations?
- **Not** like in the movies
- Those who **do not** make it?

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