



News, Views and Careers for All of Higher Education

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## Getting Faculty Off The Sidelines

There are times in a professor's career when, reacting to decisions made by athletics department officials at his institution, he might proclaim: "If only they had asked for my opinion."

If an athletics reform group made up of 55 Division I-A faculty senates has its way, that will be a regular occurrence. In "[Framing the Future: Reforming Intercollegiate Athletics](#)," a white paper released Monday, the [Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics](#) calls for a greater role for professors in overseeing what happens on the sports side of institutions.

Faculty have intermittently sought a greater role in efforts to reform college athletics, but national efforts in the late 1980s by [the American Association of University Professors](#) and other groups sputtered and more recent campaigns by the Drake Group have failed

to gain a mainstream footing. Over the years, the topic of involvement from professors has remained a [popular one](#) among groups such as the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics.

COIA's report is meant as a summation of years of conversations about athletics reform. "It pretty much outlines the direction that intercollegiate athletics needs to take to reintegrate itself back into the university," said Nathan Tublitz, co-chair of COIA and a professor of biology at the University of Oregon.

The group advocates the creation of a Campus Athletic Board on each campus, a majority of whose members would be tenured professors selected through faculty governance structures. The report says the faculty athletic representative should be an ex officio voting or non-voting member of the board, and that the chair should be a senior faculty member — and not an athletics director. This board would be consulted on all major athletics decisions, including the recruiting of athletes, hiring of key officials, changes in the number of sports offered and addition of significant facilities.

Leaders of the campus faculty governance board would meet annually with the college president to ensure that faculty members on the athletics board are fulfilling their oversight responsibilities. However these

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athletics boards are set up, the intention, Tublitz said, is to integrate faculty into everyday decision making that takes place by athletics officials.

“We’re not talking about a major shift in structure or reporting,” Tublitz said. “We’re just saying there are very complicated issues in athletics. Faculty need to be involved in the conversation. This is a movement toward democracy.”

Many campuses already have athletics councils made up of some faculty that advise sports staffs in much the way the COIA proposal advocates. At these colleges, faculty often serve as liaisons between the campus and its athletics wing, usually in the form of the faculty athletics representatives. Tublitz said the proposal is to ensure that those institutions without functioning boards form them, and to make certain that those that already have them keep the strong oversight role.

Tublitz added that the athletic board reform isn’t an indication that his group thinks faculty athletic representatives are doing a poor job — just that they need help.

R. Scott Kretchmar, a faculty athletic representative and professor of exercise and sport science at Pennsylvania State University, agreed that there is “not enough sunshine” when it comes to how athletics departments make decisions, and that there is too little faculty involvement. (Leaders of the Division I faculty representatives group did not return messages for comment.)

The majority of COIA’s paper focuses on the “primacy of academics,” saying that:

- Students should be admitted to college based on their potential for academic success and not primarily based on athletic contributions.
- Admissions policies should be the same for all students.
- The academic profiles of first-year and transfer athletes should be similar to non-athlete cohorts, and special admissions of athletes should reflect the same philosophy as special admissions of other students.
- No academic programs or majors should be designed specifically for athletes or created to allow them to keep their eligibility, and the Campus Athletic Board should monitor athlete enrollment by course.
- All graduation rate data — including the real-time Academic Progress Rate and the cumulative Graduation Success Rate — should be reviewed by a campus governance body.
- A cumulative grade point average of 2.0 should be the minimum for eligibility.
- Academic advising should take place through the existing academic structure and not through the athletics department, with the chief academic officer for the institution having oversight of the programs.
- Individual athletic competitions should not be scheduled during final exams and travel should be scheduled to minimize lost class time.

The report also calls for fiscal changes, such as keeping the overall annual growth rate for sports’ operating expenditures no greater than the overall annual growth rate in the university’s operating expenditures. Athletic fund raising, the paper says, should be incorporated into general fund raising efforts.

“None of the proposals by themselves will effect much in intercollegiate athletics, but as a group they will help reintegrate athletics,” Tublitz said.

Kretchmar, the Penn State professor, said the ideas in the report are “moderate and reasonable, and have teeth.” But he said whether they are carried out depends on what kind of peer pressure is applied by conference commissioners, presidents and even athletics directors who support the efforts.

Tublitz said he would like the reforms to be discussed by individual colleges, conference commissioners and

the National Collegiate Athletic Association, which he said already has been presented with many ideas discussed in the report.

Kevin Lennon, vice president for member services at the NCAA, said the association plans to take parts of the proposal to its members for discussions and votes. While not directly commenting on the proposal for a Campus Athletic Board, Lennon said he is encouraged by the amount of faculty engagement in intercollegiate sports reform.

“There’s a critical role for faculty to play,” he said. “They’ve been a part of the process for a long time.”

David Ridpath, executive director of the Drake Group and an assistant professor of sports administration at Mississippi State University, said he isn’t optimistic that the NCAA will adopt COIA’s reforms through the governance process. The association, he said, has left similar proposals on the shelves.

Ridpath said the faculty involvement proposals are some of the most important in the paper.

“Having tenured faculty in a position to actually establish and influence policy, without the threat of retaliation, bodes well for better faculty involvement and oversight. If established, however, these boards must have the ability and authority to check and balance the athletic department and the president with regard to athletic issues — just as the faculty senate does.

“Clearly the (faculty athletic representatives) on each campus has either abandoned the established mission and fallen in with the athletic machine, or he/she does not care. A faculty athletics board may mitigate some of these issues.”

Ridpath added that while the paper doesn’t go far enough in calling for a return to freshman ineligibility, it does deal with key issues, such as changes to how academic advising works and when games are scheduled.

— [Elia Powers](#)

## Comments

It’s commendable that some faculty still care about this obscenely commercialized joke called intercollegiate athletics. The real problem is that there are no incentives for individual faculty or college presidents to take on this locomotive composed of athletic conferences, the NCAA, and prima donna coaches and their corporate supporters.

I used to think proposals to turn intercollegiate sports into a professional enterprise (where athletes are paid to play for a sports club loosely affiliated with a college and where class attendance is not required) represented a capitulation, a “let’s legalize drugs because we can’t control them” argument. I no longer feel that way.

College sports at the D-I level are in the absolute control of the grossly overpaid executives of the major athletic conferences (the ACC, Big Ten, and so forth). Athletic directors go along for the ride, but neither they nor the presidents are in charge. Most presidents and ADs are captives.

It’s time formally to divorce college sports from the universities at the big-time programs. All the rest is irrelevant, unfortunately.

ap, at 8:35 am EDT on June 19, 2007

## What About the Rest of Campus?

The idea of a tenured faculty oversight board for intercollegiate athletics seems to be a good one. However, to truly integrate athletics back into the university, which is the stated goal, why would the entire campus not be represented? Even though it is not expressly stated in the article, the proposed boards do not seem to have spots for student representatives, adjunct faculty, professional staff, alumni, and even student athletes. It seems all should be at the table if this integration is to take place.

**TA**, at 9:50 am EDT on June 19, 2007

The NCAA is philosophically bankrupt and a surrogate for the major conferences which are comprised overwhelmingly by state universities and their huge, legislatively (non-real world) directed budgets and funding policies.

The notion that the NCAA has the will or interest in bringing about serious change is nonsense. Since the NCAA has demonstrated no interest in true reform and any affinity with the concept of a level playing field, it is up to Congress to pull the reins in. That of course is equally absurd. Where is TR when we need him?

Mike R, Schenectady, NY

**Mike Rinella**, at 10:00 am EDT on June 19, 2007

I agree that everyone should be at the table when decisions are made about any university, but that also means that athletics should have a voice in academic decisions. I don't see many faculty members being OK with that. The arrogance of most faculty that they are somehow superior to people in athletics is appalling. And for those of you whining about the NCAA and large DI athletic programs, why don't you find out how much money is donated to academics from the large profits made by the very well managed programs before you go spouting off. I know it makes you shudder, but your football team may partially fund your position. There also may not be enough students to employ you without those great teams bringing students to your university. Come down off of your very large egos to see that there is more to life than just your tiny area of study.

**CP**, at 10:30 am EDT on June 19, 2007

This would be an absolute disaster! In a very short amount of time, the politically correct atmosphere created by college professors would completely destroy college athletics. I'm sure the first thing professors would demand is equality (racial quotas) for all sports. What would that do to college basketball? Next, they would attempt to eliminate the unhealthy practice of competition... "we shouldn't keep score" because that would make on side feel inferior! I wonder how many professors would support the idea of athletic coaches having a say in whether they receive tenure? In this case, everyone should just stick to what they are trained to do.

**RJ Lash**, Stick to the books!, at 11:45 am EDT on June 19, 2007

## **Don't Discount the Congress**

Mike Rinella is right on when he says: "The NCAA is philosophically bankrupt and a surrogate for the major conferences which are comprised overwhelmingly by state universities and their huge, legislatively (non-real world) directed budgets and funding policies. The notion that the NCAA has the will or interest in bringing about serious change is nonsense. Since the NCAA has demonstrated no interest in true reform and any affinity with the concept of a level playing field, it is up to Congress to pull the reins in."

However, when he goes on to say: "That of course is equally absurd," he ignores last year's sharply-worded letter from House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Bill Thomas to NCAA President Myles Brand – seeking justification for the NCAA's tax-exempt status as an institution of higher education – and the

December 5, 2006, meeting of the Senate Finance Committee that probed the NCAA's response via testimony from Dr. James Duderstadt, Emeritus President, University of Michigan, see "The U.S. Congress: New Hope for Constructive Engagement with the NCAA and Intercollegiate Athletics," [http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt\\_Montana\\_Professor.pdf.Note](http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Montana_Professor.pdf.Note) that this article and NCAA President Myles Brand's article, "Faculty Members Constructive Engagement in Intercollegiate Athletics," appeared in the Spring 2007 issue of The Montana Professor. The articles provide contrasting views about the role and control of intercollegiate athletics. After publication, the journal was distributed to key people in the U. S. Congress.

It is my understanding that the Senate Finance Committee has given serious consideration to recommendations for sports program transparency and reporting at the NCAA and its member institutions see [http://www.thedrakegroup.org/Splitt\\_Recommendations\\_for\\_Transparency.pdf](http://www.thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Recommendations_for_Transparency.pdf).

Momentum is building in Congress to investigate how universities with big-time sports programs use their tax-exempt status to pay multi-million-dollar coaches' salaries and build extravagant athletics facilities. Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa, the senior Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, has asked the Congressional Budget Office to investigate the tax-exemption issue, see Paul Fain's article, "Senator Questions Colleges' Tax Breaks," in the April 13, 2007, issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education.

In the meantime federal tax policy will continue to force parents, students, and other American taxpayers to help foot the bill for multimillion-dollar salaries for coaches, 'stadium wars,' tax breaks for wealthy boosters, NFL and NBA minor league teams, and other artifacts of the big-time college sports arms race while the NCAA works to thwart any and all serious reform efforts.

[Frank G. Splitt](#), Member at The Drake Group, at 12:00 pm EDT on June 19, 2007

## **The NCAA thugs emerge**

*There also may not be enough students to employ you without those great teams bringing students to your university.*

and

*In this case, everyone should just stick to what they are trained to do.*

Un-freakin-believable. There's no other word for it.

**Amazed**, at 12:45 pm EDT on June 19, 2007

## **You may be on to something there, RJ**

While I don't agree that we should have no faculty involvement in athletics, I fully support the idea of having the student services side weigh in on issues in the academic side of the house, especially on things like tenure review.

Student affairs administrators have been the bastard children of the academy for far too long. Time to start the revolution.

**SB**, at 12:45 pm EDT on June 19, 2007

## **Interesting**

I do think more broad based representation beyond the faculty is good idea and should be explored. Great point. Certainly there can be broad based representation from athletics included.

For those above who stated that no (or less) students would be at the university if not for the great teams—Please give me evidence of that. There is nothing empirical that supports that statement other than a short term spike, if at all.

Also—give me one example where a athletic budget pays the salary of a faculty member. I have worked in five athletic departments in different conferences over 15 years and I never saw this happen, nor heard of it. Can you enlighten us on your claims??

[B.David Ridpath](#), Asst. Professor at Ohio University, at 1:25 pm EDT on June 19, 2007

David, Unless things have changed recently, Purdue University does not waive the tuition of student-athletes. The Athletic Dept. is responsible for paying the full tuition of each athlete on scholarship. They pay tuition out of the funds generated through the Athletic Dept. This of course, helps to pay professors salaries. (This was the policy quite a few years ago, I'm not sure if it is still practiced) Perhaps more Universities and Athletic Dept. should consider this as a way to give back to the University.

**RJ Lash**, at 6:20 pm EDT on June 19, 2007

## Donations to academics

CP suggests that big time college sports programs pay faculty salaries. This simply demonstrates an absolute ignorance about the economics of intercollegiate athletics. It represents the biggest misconception about college sports. But don't be misled: the "university" makes no money and neither do the athletes. All of it is made by the athletic machine and its revenue sports coaches and administrators.

There's no spillover to the academic side. Occasionally, some big booster sends a little check over to the library but nearly all of the money is recycled by the athletics enterprise.

**ap**, at 10:20 am EDT on June 20, 2007

## RJ

RJ—many schools do not waive the tuition and athletic departments do pay that money back in theory to the university. While a percentage may at some schools be used to support other budgets (this was not the case at schools I worked at), the lion's share of all money made from athletics, scholarships included, go back to athletics to fund the ever growing machine (i.e. coaches salaries, facility improvements, debt service).

I guess I would have to see evidence if any of the Purdue funds go in any way to pay professor salaries. Even if it did, for arguments sake, what does that justify? In fact more teams are getting cut at universities for budget reasons (read NOT Title IX but to continue to fund revenue sports), and that would make your tuition waiver argument more valid since more have been lost by dropping teams, rather than to professionalize certain sports in college athletics.

With that being said, based on my research, of the billions made in college sports, including money paid back to the university, very little if any will ever see a professors pocketbook especially since most departments (over 85% in Division I) lose money. That is where the tuition dollars from athletes are going for the most part—to pay deficits. Sad but true.

Andy Zimbalist has an excellent article in Sports Business Journal this week that lends more credence and

credibility to what I am saying. Check it out.

**B. David Ridpath**, ASsst. Professor at Ohio University, at 11:45 am EDT on June 20, 2007

One of the biases in this whole discussion is the kind of assumption that the entire context of collegiate athletics takes place in the hot house environment of NCAA I. You know what? Most of us aren't there, and most of us maybe don't like the assumption that all our athletic programs, students, coaches, administrators, etc should be tarred with the same brush. Most of us work in settings where athletics loses money but still teaches lessons and builds community, and where the athletic interests, abilities, and the enjoyment of competing are simply worthy aspects of the life of young people who choose to be college students. Every one should be concerned and involved — but not because athletics is some kind of school scalliwags and losers, but because it is part of the lives of our students and our communities.

**DA**, at 3:00 pm EDT on June 20, 2007

### **Don't Discount the Congress on Reform**

In his article [1] on the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) white paper [2] that calls for a greater role for professors in overseeing what happens on the sports side of institutions, Elia Powers writes that David Ridpath, executive director of the Drake Group, said he isn't optimistic that the NCAA will adopt COIA's reforms through its governance process.

Simply stated, it is unfortunate that COIA's common sense proposals must be approved through an NCAA governance process. Based on past experience, it's a beautiful looking dog that just won't hunt.

Mike Rinella was spot on in his posted comment, saying: "The NCAA is philosophically bankrupt and a surrogate for the major conferences which are comprised overwhelmingly by state universities and their huge, legislatively (non-real world) directed budgets and funding policies. The notion that the NCAA has the will or interest in bringing about serious change is nonsense. Since the NCAA has demonstrated no interest in true reform and any affinity with the concept of a level playing field, it is up to Congress to pull the reins in."

However, when Rinella went on to say: "That of course is equally absurd," he ignores last year's sharply-worded letter from House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Bill Thomas to NCAA President Myles Brand – seeking justification for the NCAA's tax-exempt status as an institution of higher education – and the December 5, 2006, meeting of the Senate Finance Committee that probed the NCAA's response via testimony from Dr. James Duderstadt, Emeritus President, University of Michigan.[3]

Note that the referenced article and an article by NCAA President Myles Brand [4] appeared in the Spring 2007 issue of *The Montana Professor*. After publication, copies of the journal were distributed to interested members of the U. S. Congress and their staffs. Geoffrey G. Gamble, President of Montana State University and George M. Dennison, President of the University of Montana said this in the Editor's Introduction:

"While not arranged as an exchange, the two pieces by Myles Brand and Frank Splitt offer contrasting views about the role and control of intercollegiate athletics. Brand argues for faculty engagement to assure that intercollegiate athletics remains an integral part of the academy, while Splitt urges federal intervention by Congress to bring under control what he sees as excessive dedication of higher education resources to intercollegiate athletics." [5]

It is my understanding that the Senate Finance Committee has given serious consideration to recommendations for sports program transparency and reporting at the NCAA and its member institutions.[6] Momentum appears to be building in Congress to investigate how universities with big-time sports programs use their tax-exempt status to pay multi-million-dollar coaches' salaries and build extravagant athletics

facilities. Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa, the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Finance, asked the Congressional Budget Office to investigate the tax-exemption issue.[7]

Grassley and Senator Max Baucus, the committee chairman, have worked together to conduct oversight and achieve major legislative reforms of the laws that help to govern tax-exempt organizations. They are now seeking greater transparency into the workings of these organizations — urging the Treasury Secretary to update the IRS tax form used by the nonprofit sector to make gathering more and better information a top priority and to pay particular attention to the operational complexities of nonprofit hospitals and universities.[8]

“While we always hear that sunshine is the best disinfectant, sunshine can’t do its work unless we open the blinds,” Grassley and Baucus wrote.[9] “The sooner we open those blinds the better.” “At this point, it’s clear the IRS needs to get a better picture on a wide range of issues involving tax-exempt organizations,” Grassley said.

Duderstadt has written: “While they (faculty) deplore the exploitation of student athletes and the corruption of academic values, they feel helpless to challenge the status quo in the face of pressures from coaches, athletic directors, and boosters – not to mention the benign neglect by presidents and trustees.”[10] The COIA white paper represents a stepping out in the right direction. However, it should now be evident that federal intervention is the only hope for serious reform in intercollegiate athletics.

In the meantime federal tax policy will continue to force parents, students, and other American taxpayers to help foot the bill for multimillion-dollar salaries for coaches, ‘stadium wars,’ tax breaks for wealthy boosters, NFL and NBA minor league teams, and other artifacts of the big-time college sports arms race while the NCAA works to thwart any and all serious reform efforts – including those advocated by COIA.

## NOTES

1. Powers, Elia, “Getting Faculty Off The Sidelines,” Inside Higher Ed, June 19, 2007, <http://insidehighered.com/news/2007/06/19/coia>
2. COIA. “Framing the Future: Reforming Intercollegiate Athletics,” <http://www.neuro.uoregon.edu/~tublitz/COIA/FTF/FTFtext&appendix.htm>
3. Splitt, Frank G., “The U.S. Congress: New Hope for Constructive Engagement with the NCAA and Intercollegiate Athletics,” The Montana Professor, Spring 2007, <http://mtprof.msun.edu/Spr2007/splitt.html>
4. Brand, Myles, “Faculty Members Constructive Engagement in Intercollegiate Athletics,” The Montana Professor, Spring 2007, <http://mtprof.msun.edu/Spr2007/brand.html>
5. Links to the Editors’ Introduction and to all of the journal articles are available at URL <http://mtprof.msun.edu/Spr2007/default.html>
6. Splitt, Frank G. “Recommendations for Sports Program Transparency and Reporting at the NCAA and Its Member Institutions,” [http://www.thedrakegroup.org/Splitt\\_Recommendations.pdf](http://www.thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Recommendations.pdf)
7. Fain, Paul, “Senator Questions Colleges’ Tax Breaks,” The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 13, 2007.
8. Williams, Grant, “Draft Version of Revised Tax Form for Nonprofit Groups Includes Questions About Governance and Pay,” The Chronicle Daily News, June 15, 2007, [chronicle.com/daily/2007/06/2007061503n.htm?rss](http://chronicle.com/daily/2007/06/2007061503n.htm?rss)
9. Senate Finance Committee Press Release, “Senators Work to Build Confidence in Nonprofits Through



Greater Transparency,” May 29, 2007, <http://www.senate.gov/~finance/sitepages/baucus.htm>

10. Duderstadt, James J., *The View from the Helm: Leading the American University During an Era of Change*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2007.

[Frank G. Splitt](#), Member at The Drake Group, at 7:05 pm EDT on June 20, 2007

### **Great points**

and it is certainly not fair to paint a broad brush. Still most of Division I is tragically fitting this model, while fewer are in D-II and III. There still are great programs that are ethically and fiscally grounded and we should not forget that.

[Dave Ridpath](#), Asst Prof at Ohio University, at 7:05 pm EDT on June 20, 2007

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