

Faculty group's effort targets integration of athletics

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By Gary T. Brown
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The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics is nearing completion of a white paper that includes 29 proposals designed to better integrate intercollegiate athletics into the educational mission.

The faculty-senate-based COIA conducted its third annual meeting May 12-13 at Stanford University and put finishing touches on a document the organization's full membership will vote on later this month. Once approved, the paper will be available at COIA's Web site (www.neuro.uoregon.edu).

"The proposals are intended to bring athletics into a more stable and academically appropriate environment within the university," said Nathan Tublitz, COIA co-chair and professor of neuroscience at the University of Oregon.

The paper focuses on academic integrity, student-athlete well-being, campus governance and fiscal responsibility. Those four areas align closely with topics addressed by the NCAA Presidential Task Force on the Future of Division I Intercollegiate Athletics, whose October 2006 report COIA endorsed.

Most of the proposals are strong recommendations or best practices, many of which Tublitz said could be addressed through or incorporated into the NCAA's athletics certification program, which is preparing to enter the third cycle in fall 2008. But COIA feels strongly enough about at least four of the concepts to recommend them as legislative proposals for the 2007-08 cycle. Those proposals would:

- Strengthen the scholarship commitment institutions make to student-athletes through automatically renewed grants;
- Tie athletics eligibility to a minimum grade-point average;
- Preclude athletics competition and associated travel from being conducted during final exam periods; and
- Require institutions to establish a faculty-based Campus Athletics Board to help oversee the institution's athletics program.

Tublitz said COIA wants to vet those proposals and some of the best practices through the NCAA governance structure, though he acknowledged not all of them have the consensus from COIA and NCAA officials necessary to move forward.

"We'll focus our efforts in the next year on about a dozen proposals we think the NCAA and COIA can agree upon and get them moving either through the legislative pipeline or the certification process," he said.

The proposal to renew athletics scholarships as long as the student-athlete is in good academic standing and has not violated campus conduct codes or team rules has been discussed before but has not made it to the legislative-proposal stage. Proponents regard it as a student-athlete well-being measure that adds integrity to the recruiting process, while opponents say the institution is right to determine annually the student-athlete's award based on his or her athletics contributions.

"We know it's a controversial concept," Tublitz said, "but the idea of students having their scholarships revoked because they've been injured in competition or because they've been out-performed by another potential scholarship recipient — and thus not even able to attend school — really rankles faculty members."

Significant non-legislative recommendations include:

- Tailoring requirements for "special admits" in athletics after those for non-student-athletes.
- Monitoring student-athlete enrollment by course and precluding academic majors designed simply for the purpose of allowing student-athletes to maintain eligibility.
- Consulting the Campus Athletics Board on major athletics department decisions such as sport sponsorship, hiring of key athletics personnel and investment in athletics facilities.
- Fusing athletics fund-raising efforts into those of the university.
- Suggesting the annual growth rate for athletics spending be no greater than that of the overall university.

COIA members have spent the better part of three years working on the proposals. Tublitz said it's time to advance them into the implementation stage.

"We're moving on from writing white papers to actually working with various groups, including the NCAA, to begin implementing some of these proposals," he said.

To that end, Vanderbilt University professor Virginia Shepherd, who shares the COIA chair role with Tublitz, represents COIA on the new Division I Oversight and Monitoring Group the Board of Directors appointed to implement Presidential Task Force proposals. That group chaired by University of Memphis President Shirley Raines met for the first time May 21 and began developing implementation strategies, too.

"I was heartened by that meeting," Shepherd said of the May 21 session. "I felt there was a lot of energy in that room to get some teeth into the recommendations and make some real progress."

Faculty voice



Beyond the progress on the white paper, Tublitz and Shepherd praised the meeting at Stanford for its inclusive representation. The session attracted 42 members representing 37 of the 55 faculty senates that compose the organization — the largest turnout of the three COIA meetings.

Invited guests included Alan Hauser, president elect of the Faculty Athletics Representatives Association; Percy Bates, chair of the 1A Faculty Athletics Representatives; Amy Perko, executive director of the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics; and Robert Malekoff of the College Sports Project. NCAA President Myles Brand also addressed the group about the need for faculty involvement in intercollegiate athletics. Other presenters were COIA founder and Oregon professor Jim Earl, and Malcolm Moran, former journalist and current Knight Chair in Sports Journalism and Society at Pennsylvania State University.

Tublitz said representation from other faculty organizations was significant. "The various faculty groups are feeling more comfortable with each other and realizing that we all have to work together to generate a uniform faculty voice on some of the major issues in intercollegiate athletics," he said.

"I was impressed with the level of commitment," Shepherd said. "Members at the meeting were on the same page as far as acknowledging athletics not

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being in crisis but perhaps headed off track."

Shepherd also said members noted the need to do a much better job at the campus and conference level initiating dialogue with decision-makers. She said members plan to meet with presidents to discuss the recommendations and form a campus plan, and also meet with conference commissioners, something Shepherd said has not been done much before. "We need to involve the conferences in a more substantive way," she said.

COIA members also discussed the future of the organization, which originated five years ago as a short-term entity to raise faculty concerns. "But our current membership feels we shouldn't disappear," Tublitz said. "The fact is that the original intent of COIA was to work for a few years and then disappear. Our members now, though, advocate expanded membership and a continued increase in interaction with other organizations involved with intercollegiate athletics. It's a testament to the strength of the faculty voice."

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