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WHAT FACULTY CAN DO TO PREVENT COLLEGE SPORT FROM BECOMING PROFESSIONALIZED

The Steering Committee of the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA), an alliance of faculty Senates from half of the academic institutions in the Football Bowl Subdivision (formerly D1A), considers the current course charted by the NCAA and other intercollegiate athletics decision-makers to be fundamentally misguided. As faculty who are responsible for upholding the academic integrity of our institutions, we believe the recent reorganization plan by the NCAA, supported by college presidents and conference commissioners, is not in alignment with the academic values of our institutions nor does it support the principal tenet of the NCAA's mission: the amateur student-athlete model.

The recent re-organization of the NCAA Division 1 governance system ensures that 90% of seats on the central D1 legislative body will go to athletics directors, other campus athletics administrators, and conference commissioners, a reflection of the rising priority of business management in athletics decision making. This restructuring sharply curtails the faculty voice in the new NCAA D1 governance system. D1 re-organization also granted for the first time limited regulatory autonomy to the five best resourced conferences. Although the stated purpose of autonomy was to allow the "Big 5" to offer enhanced benefits to athletes (including some COIA has long advocated), one Big 5 conference commissioner quickly noted that because it is not conceivable that these new benefits will be funded by cuts in salaries for coaches and high-level athletics administrators, autonomy will likely result instead in the elimination of many Olympic and other non-revenue sports teams. Present and former athletics administrators have gone further by proposing an end to non-revenue sports scholarships across the board. An analysis of the financing of college sports confirms that at most schools, if the extravagant salaries of coaching staffs and upper athletics administration are off limits to fund increased benefits, such consequences are very likely.

The common theme here is the marginalization of academic values in college athletics. The actions and priorities of athletics administrators now setting NCAA policy reflect the perspective of sports management. With faculty influence on the NCAA legislative Council reduced to a token presence, perspectives grounded in academics will be lost. And while Big 5 autonomy was purportedly granted for the purpose of enhancing athlete benefits, unintended consequences may well mean the ultimate loss of student participation and student-athlete financial support opportunities at both Big 5 schools and at less well-resourced universities that attempt to compete with them; athletes in sports where synergy with academics has historically been highest will find opportunities and benefits sharply reduced, among other possible negative consequences. Meanwhile, market forces, financial pressures, and the courts seem poised to eliminate the student-athlete as amateur model from the revenue sports in favor of a professional model.

These are outcomes no one wants, and their increasing likelihood demonstrates how far high profile athletics has run beyond the control of the universities that offer it. Schools are locked in an arms-race type competition to preserve and enhance their reputational standing based on the celebrity status of

The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) is an alliance of faculty governance bodies from the academic institutions in the Football Bowl Subdivision. COIA's mission is to promote the academic integrity of our universities, and to represent the interests of our faculties, non-athlete students and student-athletes in matters related to college sports that can significantly affect the health, sustainability and educational missions of our institutions.

<https://sites.comm.psu.edu/thecoa/>

revenue sports, a dynamic that forces them to sacrifice the academic values at the core of their missions. University presidents are on record: they feel powerless to confront these trends.

Root causes are not mysterious: they include the American sports culture, the costs and constraints of participating in a national sports market, and beliefs about the institutional benefits of high profile athletics, among other factors. But one contributing cause has been the inability of campus faculties, who have the responsibility for protecting the academic missions of their schools, to mobilize their energy and expertise in a coordinated effort to ensure that major athletics policy decisions are not dictated by market forces without regard for academic values.

What can faculty do about this situation? The leadership of the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics urges senates and faculties at all Division 1 schools to open a serious discussion on the relationship between the current version of intercollegiate sports and their institutional values. To jump start these faculty conversations, COIA has proposed specific areas in which progress can be made to bring big-time college sports back into alignment with academic values. These include:

- Changing current institutional admission and recruiting policies;
- Ensuring the primacy of academics in athletic decisions;
- Reducing competitive and practice schedules to allow for academic studies;
- Integrating athletic academic advising facilities into the existing academic advising structure;
- Creating a campus athletic governance structure that includes a strong faculty presence;
- Controlling the escalation of athletic expenditures to reduce dependence on commercialization and the dictates of market forces;
- Adding more faculty to NCAA governance bodies.

Details of these suggestions and others can be found at the [COIA website](#), and in proposals the Coalition has adopted such as "[Framing the Future](#)."

Despite its best intentions and clear mandate as stated in its mission statement, it is not clear whether the NCAA is capable of implementing these proposals. If not, another national structure must be found to support the concept of the student-athlete model of intercollegiate sports on our campuses and to allow our student-athletes to be students first and athletes second. Faculty pressure on the NCAA, conference commissioners and campus academic administrators is crucial and time is running out to have meaningful faculty input into the future of intercollegiate athletics. The academic integrity of our institutions, and the academy, are at stake.

In the name of the COIA Steering Committee,

Michael G. Bowen, Chair
Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics
Department of Management & Organization
College of Business
The University of South Florida
Tampa, Florida 33620
mbowen@usf.edu