

We are writing to you as the national Steering Committee of the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA), an alliance of faculty senates at sixty-three NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) schools. COIA's mission since its inception in 2002 has been to enable elected faculty governance bodies at FBS schools to provide a well-informed national faculty voice that can help find solutions to problems in college sports.

We are deeply concerned that in its latest announced plan for restructuring Division I, the NCAA appears poised to marginalize or eliminate the role of Faculty Athletics Representatives (FARs) in the Division's central legislative committee. In our view, such a decision risks undermining academic values basic to the NCAA and its member schools. We are asking you and other leaders of FBS colleges and universities to call for reconsideration of this issue before any final restructuring plan is implemented.

In restructuring Division I the NCAA confronts a need to provide greater leverage both to managerial expertise and to academic values. In its latest proposal, the key operational pivot of Division I, a legislative committee to be called the "Council," is indeed designed to provide a controlling role for managerial expertise, but without providing an institutional commitment to the academic mission that lies at the core of the NCAA Collegiate Model. Under the current proposal, the 38 member Council will include one representative of each of the 32 Division I conferences, plus four conference commissioners and two student-athletes. At least sixty percent of the Council membership must be Athletics Directors, but there is no stipulated quota of FARs. We believe it is unlikely that in a committee dominated by ADs, any conference will select an FAR to be its representative. The result will be a legislative Council without members whose primary professional commitment is to the academic mission.

The 1A FAR Association has repeatedly addressed this problem, recommending that a formula be found that ensures a robust cohort of FARs on the committee that will balance managerial expertise with members focused on ensuring the governing role of academic values. We strongly support the 1A FAR Association position.

As you are aware, the NCAA has recently come under widespread criticism, and a central complaint has been that while the NCAA is supposed to regulate sports according to academic values, it often appears to operate as a cartel, exploiting monopolistic control of college sports for economic advantage. We know that the NCAA is much more. It is a league of academic institutions trying, under the difficult constraints of antitrust law, to regulate a costly and highly visible aspect of their programs in the interest of athletes, students, and higher education.

However, economic pressures on the largest programs have often put them in conflict with their academic missions. In Division I, the NCAA decision-making process sometimes appears to prioritize economic over academic factors, and this is the source of public criticism and the rising demand that athletes be paid as participants in a primarily commercial, rather than academically justified enterprise.

Recently, former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue, testifying before the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, urged the NCAA to restructure in such a way that it could be called the NCAA: the National Collegiate Academic Athletic Association. We agree. The first step in restoring public confidence and addressing calls for professionalization and unionization of athletes is to make clear that in future decision-making, academic values will be in charge. This is why both the appearance and the substance of a strong FAR role in routine decisions are critical.

The principal stewards of the NCAA's academic mission are the university presidents who control the Association and who will constitute the dominant majority of its governing Board. However, presidents can devote only a fraction of their time to athletics, and a principle of the current Division I restructuring is that the Board will withdraw from operational control over the Division's policies and procedures, placing that responsibility largely in the hands of a Council composed of expert practitioners.

The presidentially appointed FARs are the expert practitioners who carry the academic perspective of the presidents into every aspect of operational decision making in the NCAA. To permit them to be marginalized or absent from the Council would seriously weaken the force of presidential control in Division I. It would substantively undermine the NCAA's ability to fulfill its academic commitments and encourage further public skepticism about the academic orientation of the NCAA.

COIA is firmly committed to the primacy of academic values in college sports and to presidential control of the NCAA. For this reason, we hope you and other FBS presidents will urge the NCAA and its Subcommittee on Restructuring to reconsider the current plan for the Division I Council, and to ensure a balance between managerial expertise, provided by Athletics Directors and other sports administrators, and academic commitment, expressed through the participation of FARs. We believe this to be essential to preservation of the Collegiate Model.

Sincerely,

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