



A Framework for Comprehensive Athletics Reform

Executive Summary

Recommended by the COIA Steering Committee, Fall 2003

[NOTE: Sections III.1-3 of the Framework have been superseded by "Campus Athletics Governance, the Faculty Role," approved by the COIA membership in April 2004. Sections I and II have been superseded by "Academic Integrity in Intercollegiate Athletics," approved by the COIA membership in April 2005. Sections III. 5, IV. 1-2, and V have been further addressed by "A Report to the NCAA Presidential Task Force" approved by the COIA steering committee, December 2005.]

The need for reform of intercollegiate athletics is serious and requires immediate action. The problems are not new, but they are worsening. During the 1990s, universities and the NCAA responded to the 1989 Knight Commission report, yet in 2000 the Commission concluded that intercollegiate athletics was more troubled than ever. The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA), a national network of Division I-A faculty leaders, believes that reform requires a comprehensive approach that addresses five issues: **(1) academic integrity, (2) athlete welfare, (3) governance of athletics at the school and conference level, (4) finances, and (5) over-commercialization.** Some of these issues may be resolved quickly, but others may require as much as a decade. With a comprehensive plan, however, we can avoid the ineffectiveness of the piecemeal approach of the 1990s. The present document reflects a consensus within the COIA; not every faculty leader associated with the Coalition will agree with all points. It is our hope that in conversation with other groups and individuals—such as the NCAA, the Association of Governing Boards (AGB), the AAUP, and university presidents—it can contribute to a plan of action for the coming decade. The Coalition encourages efforts to compile and analyze relevant data, and remains open to rethinking its positions as information becomes available.

There is wide diversity among college sports. While some issues may be of general concern, others may pertain very differently to team and individual sports, or to sports where the highest levels of competition are professional or amateur. A document as brief as this cannot attempt comprehensiveness. The process of reform we envision would appropriately adapt to each sport the general approaches we advocate. While some aspects of reform can and should be carried out immediately, others may involve complex solutions and significant lead time. The goal of the

Coalition is to work with all groups over the next two years to develop a comprehensive plan that can be practically implemented as a series of scheduled steps.

The goal of reform is not negative; it is to bring out the positive aspects of intercollegiate athletics, which contributes to the personal development of athletes, connects schools to their alumni and communities, and enhances life on campus and off.

I. Issues of Academic Integrity [Note: Section I has been superseded by "Academic Integrity in Intercollegiate Athletics," approved by the COIA in April 2005]

1. *Initial eligibility and admissions.* In football and men's basketball especially, many athletes are academically under-prepared, and have such heavy commitments to sports that they have little or no prospect of graduation. Students should not be enrolled if they do not have reasonable prospects of graduation. The Coalition supports the NCAA's initiative to raise initial eligibility standards through strengthening core course requirements, and supports the proposal to increase this requirement to 16 courses within five years. The NCAA's sliding scale of GPA and SAT/ACT scores has significantly increased reliance on high school grades. Universities should be required to inform high schools of the academic success rates of their graduates by sport, so that they can assess whether graduating athletes are really prepared to succeed academically. Admissions decisions regarding athletes with scores below institutional standards should involve academic review procedures no less rigorous than apply to other types of students; faculty review is recommended.

2. *Continuing eligibility.* The COIA supports the NCAA's recent strengthening of continuing eligibility standards, and its incentives/disincentives proposal. Exceptional cases may occur with regard to both GPA and progress-towards-degree requirements; appeals in such cases should involve faculty and NCAA review.

3. *Grading and program integrity.* At some schools athletes are given preferential treatment to ensure continuing eligibility, either through academically unchallenging programs or differential grading practices. Such practices can only be addressed at the institutional level. Faculty at all schools should be provided with data concerning the majors and academic performance of all athletes, disaggregated to the highest degree permitted by law and distinguished by sport; procedures should be developed that allow faculty to determine there are no pressures to lower academic standards, and that permit abuses to be easily reported.

4. *Academic advising and related services.* Because athletes have such heavy burdens on their time, schools typically provide them enhanced support. Advising programs supervised through the Athletics Departments are a common source of academic violations. COIA recommends that Athletics Department advisors be appointed in the regular campus advising system, report through the academic advising structure, and be assessed by an academic-side review.

II. Issues of Athlete Welfare [Note: Section II has been superseded by "Academic Integrity in Intercollegiate Athletics," approved by the COIA in April 2005]

1. *The 20-hour rule.* The NCAA places a 20-hour weekly maximum on in-season non-academic athletics activities to ensure that athletes can give adequate time to academics. Athletics departments must not permit coaches to schedule explicitly or implicitly mandatory training beyond the limit. Athletes often wish to devote more time to training individually, and this is their prerogative, but coaches and advisors should discourage it when it appears to interfere with academics. The Coalition supports efforts underway among NCAA Faculty Athletics Representatives (FARs) to develop better methods for enforcing the limit. Not only training, but all explicitly or implicitly required activities should be considered part of the 20-hour limit. Schools should empower Athletics Governance Committees to develop principles for training schedules and to monitor compliance. Evaluation of coaches should include their compliance with training limits, and encouragement of a balanced approach to academic and athletic needs. Athletics conferences should consider training-limit violations an infringement on conference rules, and review practices at member schools.

2. *Schedules for competition.* Schedules should provide an adequate competitive season with the least possible interference with the academic needs of athletes. In recent years, seasons in many sports have grown in length and number of competitions; no further expansion should be adopted, and efforts should be made to reduce season schedules. The Coalition recommends that the NCAA and FARs lead an effort to develop and adopt optimal scheduling principles for each sport. Certain principles should apply generally: seasons must be confined to a single academic term; "non-traditional" seasons must be eliminated; weeknight competitions during the regular season should generally be eliminated; seasons must be designed to minimize travel. In this same spirit, spring football practice should be curtailed and closely monitored.

3. *Scholarships.* No athlete should feel the need to shortchange academic commitment in order to retain scholarship support. Scholarship support should never be terminated for a student who has demonstrated effort in athletics, who wishes to continue in athletics, and who has met standards of academic and personal conduct. Lengthening the term of athletes' scholarships should be explored.

4. *Integration in campus life.* Athletes on campus are students first, and should have the opportunity to participate fully in campus life. They should participate in normal orientation activities. Athletic advisors should make athletes aware of the full range of campus opportunities available to them. They should help them coordinate major requirements and the demands of athletics. No athlete should be discouraged from pursuing a major because of athletics.

5. *Professionalization.* Athletics departments should make their goal the development of well-rounded students. While coaches work to win, those who win at the cost of the balanced development of their athletes should not be rewarded or retained. The NCAA, through the work of FARs, athletics directors, and coaches, should develop "best-

practice” criteria for the evaluation of coaches and other athletics staff, to reward excellence that conforms with the best amateur ideals, rather than the standards of professional sports.

III. Governance Issues [Note: Sections III.1-3 have been superseded by "Campus Athletics Governance, the Faculty Role," approved by the COIA membership in April 2004 and Sections III. 5 has been further addressed by "A Report to the NCAA Presidential Task Force" approved by the COIA steering committee, December 2005.]

The ultimate authority for athletics governance must lie with university presidents. Athletics programs must enhance the academic mission. For presidents to be effective in aligning athletics with the academic mission, they must have the backing of governing boards and effective input from faculty. Our focus here is on the faculty role.

1. Faculty Athletics Representatives. The effectiveness of the FAR is central to athletics governance. The appointment and evaluation of the FAR must be credible to administration and faculty, and the FAR must be supported with funds, release time, and authority. **Guidelines** designed to assess FAR offices have been developed at Penn State University. The Coalition proposes these be used to develop a “best-practice” model for other schools during 2003-04. Individual schools must be responsible for the effectiveness of the FAR office, but NCAA review should be part of a best-practices model.

2. Athletics Governance Committee. An Athletics Governance Committee should exist on every campus, bringing faculty (including the FAR), administrators, and students together to oversee intercollegiate athletics. It should be the chief policy-setting organ for athletics programs, and should review special admissions, major personnel decisions and reviews, and assessment of budgets and financial performance. The constitution, appointment and authority of the committee must ensure credibility. The Coalition proposes that Penn State **Guidelines** be used in this case too, as the basis for a best-practices model.

3. Faculty senates. Faculty senates or their executive committees should receive detailed reports on campus sports programs at least annually from the FAR and Athletics Governance Committee, including academic performance of athletes, program budgets, and NCAA infractions. Faculty senates should be involved in the appointment of both the FAR and faculty members of the Athletics Governance Committee. A best-practices model should be developed for faculty senates in these regards.

4. Financial reporting principles. Uniform reporting standards for athletics budgets should be established, to allow the development of common guidelines and practices, and to provide more transparency in how colleges and universities account for revenues and expenses. At most schools, athletics program expenses exceed revenues and require funds from the academic side or the assessment of student fees. These should be determined through an open governance process, in which governing boards, administration, and faculty participate.

5. *The role of conferences.* Conferences enhance the role of athletics by creating traditions of rivalry central to school identity, and alumni and community loyalty. As a level of athletics governance, the conference can create or influence policies concerning academic standards, athlete welfare, limits of program scale, and so forth. The conference has its fullest effect when its members share regional identity, academic standards and goals, or longstanding common traditions. Lasting reform of college sports requires stable conference structures that represent academic rather than simply financial relationships. Conferences that also serve as academic consortia, such as the Big Ten, and recent initiatives by faculty leaders in the SEC to create structures of conference-wide faculty governance to complement and monitor athletics relationships, are models of the direction the Coalition believes conferences should take. Coalition partners such as the AGB and the AAUP can play a role in promoting models for intercollegiate relationships, but ultimately, university presidents and conference commissioners must set long-term conference goals beyond athletic revenues.

IV. Financial Issues [Note: Section IV. 1-2 has been further addressed by "A Report to the NCAA Presidential Task Force" approved by the COIA steering committee, December 2005.]

The rising costs of athletics programs place a strain on schools at a time of budget scarcity, and attempts to solve this problem through increased commercialization can lead to an impairment of institutional control over athletics, increased financial commitments (e.g., facilities), and violations of taste that can alienate donors. Reform in this area is likely to take longer than in the others, because of the complexity of the issues. However, so many problems can be traced to issues of cost and commercialization that no reforms will be effective unless these are successfully addressed. Gradual but firmly scheduled changes pertaining to cost and commercialization must accompany the more rapid implementation of reforms in the areas of academics, welfare, and governance.

1. *Winning and revenues.* Winning is the goal of athletes and coaches, and programs appropriately promote winning. In the revenue sports, winning is also generally viewed as essential to financial health. However, to the degree that financial success is tied to winning, intercollegiate athletics cannot be healthy on the national level: not only do half of all competitors lose, but the emphasis on post-season tournaments and national championships raises the bar and increases the number of programs that fall short. The link between winning and financial success induces programs to invest in sports with the goal of financial returns, and drives a competitive cost spiral. The Coalition supports increased revenue-sharing (beyond the participants in events) to minimize revenue-driven incentives for winning. To the degree allowable under federal anti-trust laws, conferences should also seek to control expenses and capital investment, to create as level a playing field as possible. Increasing revenue-sharing and limiting expenses may disadvantage programs that are currently most successful financially; developing a plan that buffers these effects during the period of reform is necessary and will take time.

2. *Professional standards and costs.* Increased media attention and rising expectations among fans have led to the application of professional standards to college sports,

including increasingly sophisticated equipment, facilities and specialized coaching staffs. Training for professional sports careers is not a goal of intercollegiate athletics, nor does it benefit the vast majority of college athletes; higher education gains nothing from serving as a minor league for professional sports. Conferences should establish standards for equipment, facilities, and coaching staffs appropriate to amateur competition, and restrain excesses as violations.

3. *Other cost reduction possibilities.*

- a. *Scholarships.*** The present number of athletic scholarships may be too high, and should be reviewed for each sport, with the goal of fostering amateurism and reducing the impact of commercial expectations. Scholarships based on need should be considered as an alternative to the current system, consistent with the concerns raised in the earlier discussion of scholarships and athlete welfare.
- b. *Football squad sizes.*** The size of football squads should be reassessed.
- c. *Season length and design.*** Shortening seasons (and post-seasons) is justified on student welfare grounds and would also cut costs. Schedules should be designed to emphasize conference play, reducing travel costs.
- d. *Off-campus recruitment.*** Off-campus recruitment by coaches places a heavy demand on coaches' time, requiring more staff, and it encourages students' self-identification as athletes rather than students. This costly competition for prospects provides no net gain for higher education, and rewards coaches for success as recruiters, rather than for adding value as teachers, mentors, and coaches. The Coalition recommends exploring limitations on off-campus recruitment.

V. Over-commercialization [Note: Section V has been further addressed by "A Report to the NCAA Presidential Task Force" approved by the COIA steering committee, December 2005.]

Televising games can deepen the loyalties of nationally dispersed alumni and raise public awareness of higher education. However, the marketing of intercollegiate athletics impairs institutional control, and may undermine support for academics. It may link universities to products and corporate sponsors that present conflicts with institutional values; may impair institutional control over scheduling and contracts; and may lead to misjudgments of taste that damage public perception of higher education. "Name recognition" and "fan loyalty" based on televised sports has not been demonstrated to contribute to the academic mission, and is costly and unproductive for American higher education; it contributes to a misperception by young people and parents of the nature and purpose of higher education, and reinforces an emphasis on athletics over academics in high schools. Moreover, college programs increasingly emulate features of professional sports, raising costs that eliminate revenue gains. Stepping back from over-commercialization entails cost-cutting and the articulation by presidents and conferences of firm standards of presentation and control.

