



## **Academic Integrity in Intercollegiate Athletics: Principles, Rules, and Best Practices**

### **Executive Summary**

There are three primary rationales for intercollegiate athletics: it can contribute to personal development reinforcing academic excellence; it can contribute to community and institutional loyalty; it can broaden positive interest in and public support for higher education. The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics strongly supports these goals. However, these values cannot be realized if we abandon the principle that personal development through athletics participation and academic achievement are inextricably linked. The Coalition, as a faculty-governance based alliance devoted to athletics reform, has developed proposals and guidelines to help faculty and others on campus fulfill their responsibilities with regard to the impact of athletics on academic standards and integrity. Some of the basic principles and major proposals are summarized in this brief overview. (All proposed NCAA bylaw changes are noted as such below.)

#### **1. Admissions.**

- At many schools, there is a different admissions process for athletes, and faculty may not have adequate information to confirm its academic integrity. The Coalition recommends that campuses examine the processes by which scholarship athletes who do not meet minimal academic criteria are granted admissions.
- Faculty governance bodies should work with their administrations to develop policies concerning these processes, and procedures through which faculty governance bodies can be informed of their implementation.
- Campuses should collect and analyze data on the academic performance of all athletes, to better assess the range of admissions qualifications appropriate to athletes, including athletes who enter as transfer students.

#### **2. Scholarships.**

Under the current one-year renewable structure of athletics scholarships, athletes may be legitimately concerned that their continued access to education depends on sports success. This

can create a conflict of incentives that may lead to an emphasis on athletics at cost to academics. The Coalition recommends that NCAA standards require that there be a presumption of scholarship renewal for a period of five years, or until graduation, and that scholarships be revocable only by the chief academic officer. [NCAA bylaw proposal, Section 2.1]

- Because the rationale for merit scholarships based on athletic, rather than academic qualifications is not strong, the Coalition recommends that a reassessment be made of the feasibility of converting athletics scholarships to a need basis.
- The Coalition believes that “pay for play” proposals to compensate athletes beyond scholarship support are inconsistent with the principles of amateur sports on which intercollegiate athletics is based; it is concerned that the conduct of college sports in other respects may be creating a context in which maintaining amateur values will not be possible.

### **3. Curricular Integrity.**

- The campus faculty bears primary responsibility for ensuring that academic programs conform to high standards of integrity in curriculum and student evaluation. Reports of differential academic treatment of athletes by faculty have persisted for years and occasionally been confirmed, but without detailed data on athlete enrollment patterns and grades, faculty governance bodies have no way of routinely assessing the integrity of campus programs in this regard or remediating problems that may exist. The Coalition therefore proposes that campuses collect data on the academic performance of athletes by course section, and convey that information to their campus faculty governance bodies, protecting the anonymity of individual student records. [NCAA bylaw proposal, Section 3.1]
- Academically prejudicial treatment of athletes is of equal concern, and we recommend that policies against this be consistently applied.
- The Coalition recommends heightened scrutiny of courses taught by athletics department staff and controls to manage conflicts of interest when athletes are enrolled in them. The Coalition also recommends that the amount of academic credit awarded for varsity sports participation be determined by the faculty and strictly limited.

### **4. Time Commitment, Missed Class Time, and Scheduling of Competitions.**

- In no way does a school more clearly signal an inappropriate prioritization of athletics over academics than when it sends the message that training or competitions take priority over class attendance and coursework.
- Because coaches have great leverage to guide their athletes to place academics first, the Coalition recommends performance assessments of coaches and close monitoring that creates incentives for coaches to use that leverage constructively.
- The competition scheduling decisions that campuses make directly affect the challenges athletes face in the classroom. The Coalition recommends that Faculty Athletics Representatives and campus athletics boards be meaningfully involved in the design of season schedules to ensure that academic priorities guide planning.

- It is not clear that the current length of competition seasons is designed so as to ensure that the basic goals of amateur college sports are fulfilled with the least possible interference with academic goals. The Coalition recommends that an FAR-led task force be commissioned by the NCAA to assess this issue for each sport.
- Because the growth of non-traditional seasons in many sports have significantly extended overall competition seasons, the Coalition supports an NCAA bylaw change that would eliminate divided competitive seasons. [NCAA bylaw proposal, Section 4.3.2.]
- The Coalition recommends that the NCAA and the conferences reverse the trend towards expanding seasons at the beginning and at the end, in particular post-season tournaments, as well as reversing the increased reliance on athletic events scheduled on weekdays
- Efforts should be made by schools and conferences to ensure that athletes do not have competitions scheduled during final exams.

## **5. Policies Concerning the Office of Academic Advising for Athletes (OAAA).**

- The success of athlete advising is critical for the academic integrity of campus sports programs. Faculty have a responsibility to understand the role of the OAAA, and to be assured that the office is structured to operate with integrity.
- The single most difficult issue that confronts the OAAA is to maintain a focus on maximizing the academic accomplishments of athletes, given their athletics commitments, rather than on maintaining their athletic eligibility. The OAAA should be structured in such a way as to maximize its ability to manage this tension successfully. The Coalition recommends that the OAAA report to the chief academic officer of the campus; this does not rule out a secondary reporting line to the athletics department, whose engagement with the OAAA can contribute substantially to its strength, but the chief academic officer must bear primary responsibility for ensuring the integrity of the OAAA.
- Qualifications for the director and the advising staff should be set at the high levels towards which the profession of academic advising has evolved.
- Structures should ensure that advisors are not placed in disadvantageous positions with regard to coaches; for example, the Coalition recommends having multiple advisors share team advising duties, rather than have individuals serve as sole advisor assigned to work with a specific team. Advising staff, rather than coaches, should have primary responsibility in the athlete's selection of major and specific courses, and advisors alone should have authority to contact instructors with regard to individual students.
- Coalition guidelines include a checklist of elements that characterize many successful academic advising programs, as well as a list of athlete support functions that can enhance the overall effectiveness of the OAAA.