

**RE-INTEGRATING ATHLETICS INTO ACADEMICS: SUPPORTING THE
ATHLETIC ACADEMIC ADVISOR
National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) 2007 Convention
N. Tublitz
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Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. I'd like to start with a story, perhaps apocryphal, from my institution, the University of Oregon.

The football coach and a math professor walked into the locker room before a big game. They went over to the star player and the math professor said, "The coach is not supposed to let you play since you failed math, but we need you in there. So, I'm here to ask you a math question, and if you get it right, you can play."

The player agreed, so the math professor asked, "Okay, now concentrate hard and tell me the answer to this. What is 2.5 plus 2.5?"

The player thought for a moment and then answered tentatively, "5?"

"Did you say 5?" the coach said, excited that he had got it right and the team now had a great chance at winning.

Suddenly all the other players on the team began screaming..., "Come on coach, give him another chance!"

To which the math professor said "You got it wrong. It's 5.0. Sorry, you can't play today."

Let's agree right now that the era, if it ever existed, of the dumb jock, the must-win-at-all-costs coach, and the uncaring professor is over. The vast majority of athletes are in school for an education as well as for their sport, coaches want the best for their players, and professors care about their students. All three – athletes, coaches and professors – want the same outcome: a first rate college experience for the student resulting in a college degree.

There are, however, serious impediments preventing us from reaching this goal. The culture of college sports, heavily influenced by big money, commercial interests and mass media, is inching ever closer to a professional model. One unwelcome outcome is a marked increase in inappropriate behavior at all levels. We've seen athletes misbehaving, coaches padding their resumes, faculty running fake courses, admissions officers admitting unqualified athletes, and institutions building overly lavish facilities. These actions are antithetical to the values and life skills we are trying to instill in our students. In many respects college sports is increasingly at odds with the academic mission of our universities.

So what can be done to reverse this unfortunate trend? The key is to re-integrate athletics into the values, goals and mission of our institutions. This can be achieved only if we acknowledge and respect two basic principles. The first is that intercollegiate athletics must be in alignment with the academic mission of the institution. College sports needs to support this mission in all its activities including providing athletes with the opportunity to succeed in their studies. The second principle is that college sports must adhere to the collegiate athletics model. College sports clearly have positive benefits for our athletes, our campuses and our communities. Yet the primary reason for an athlete to attend a college or university is

to receive an education. Athletic participation must complement rather than supplant the goals of education and personal growth.

To its credit, the NCAA has taken the lead in insisting that the educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount. Under Myles Brand's leadership, the NCAA has recently instituted several important measures to improve student-athlete academic performance including tightening admissions requirements for scholarship athletes, coupling athletic eligibility to academic progress, and penalizing athletic teams with low graduation rates. Our group, the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA), an alliance of 55 Division 1A faculty senates providing a national faculty voice on college sports issues, strongly applauds and supports the NCAA's academic reform efforts.

Two key pieces of the NCAA's reforms are the APR and GSR and continued support for these are crucial. However, we cannot stop there. Next week COIA will release a paper entitled "*Framing the Future: Reforming Intercollegiate Athletics*". In this paper we put forward 28 separate proposals that, if adopted, would go a long way towards re-integrating athletics into academics. This paper has been reviewed by many outside groups including the NCAA and the N4A. We are currently working closely with the NCAA to adopt many of these proposals into NCAA legislation or certification. Four proposals directly address issues of concern to the N4A.

The first is that athletic academic advising and support student-athletes should be structured to give student-athletes as valuable and meaningful an educational experience as possible and not just to maintain their athletic eligibility. This goes directly to integration piece.

The second is that the academic advising facility for student-athletes should be integrated into and report through the existing academic advising structure and not through the Athletics Department. The third is that athletic academic advisors should be appointed by and work for the campus academic advising structure and not solely for the Athletics Department. The goal of these two proposals is to eliminate potential conflicts that occur when athletic advising is run by the Athletic Department.

The fourth is that academic advising of athletes should be overseen and regularly reviewed by the campus academic advising structure or the office of the chief academic officer, as occurs for other campus advising facilities.

Taken together, these proposals are designed to maintain the integrity of athletic advising, allowing you, the academic athletic advisor, to perform your job properly and provide the guidance necessary for our athletes to succeed academically.

The pushback to the APR and GSR is growing nationally and will become more strident in the next year as penalties are handed out. You and your N4A colleagues around the country are key to the ultimate success of the NCAA's academic reforms. Through our faculty senates, COIA's faculty leaders want to work with you and your colleagues to help sustain these reforms. Together we can meet the current challenges facing college sports and achieve the goals we all desire: to have our athletes be successful students, graduate with a college degree, and most importantly, reach their potential.