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Faculty group presents syllabus for reform Coalition for Intercollegiate Athletics advocates curricular integrity

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In the spirit of partnership, hundreds of faculty at NCAA member institutions are offering their own class on reform.

The instructor is the Coalition for Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA), a representative group of faculty senates at Division I institutions, and the textbook is a document containing dozens of best practices on faculty governance and oversight of athletics -- plus several legislative proposals geared toward academic reform. Among them are measures that would require institutions to collect data on student-athlete enrollment and grade-point average patterns, and provide for automatic renewal of athletics grants-in-aid over a five-year period.

"There is a much broader group of faculty who are interested in being part of the conversation on reform," said Indiana University, Bloomington, professor Bob Eno. "We recognize that the NCAA is assuming a leadership role in strengthening academic performance, and we're happy to join in the effort."

Eno co-chairs the COIA along with Vanderbilt University professor Virginia L. Shepherd. The group, formed in 2002, is an alliance of 47 faculty senates from Division I-A schools. Some of the group's members are faculty athletics representatives, but most are not, resulting in a broader alliance with faculty than the NCAA has enjoyed in the past.

The group has been both energetic and patient, aggressively seeking input and feedback from other faculty organizations such as the Division I Faculty Athletics Representatives, the Faculty Athletics Representatives Association (FARA) and the American Association of University Professors, but also learning about what it takes to accomplish change within the Division I governance framework.

The COIA's commitment to reform is evidenced by the fact that only one member voted not to support the COIA best practices and proposals document completed in April. Eno and Shepherd are quick to acknowledge the significance of that support, since each has presided over faculty senates at their respective institutions, and they both agree on the challenge of building a consensus in that arena. "Faculty members typically are not a group that can be pushed," Shepherd said.

But they apparently believe in this effort.

The group is motivated by a belief that -- much like the NCAA mission states -- intercollegiate athletics can and should be an integral part of the higher education experience.

The COIA offers three premises for intercollegiate athletics:

- * For the athlete, the discipline and values of sports can contribute to personal development, reinforcing academic excellence;
- * For the campus, the ceremonies and competition of intercollegiate sports can contribute to community and institutional loyalty; and
- * For the college and university community, college sports can broaden positive interest in public support for higher education.

The COIA believes college sports should be pursued in a way that supports those claims. "The strength of the COIA -- and perhaps the difference between the COIA and other groups -- is in our stating right up front that we feel athletics is an important part of the educational mission," Shepherd said. "We are trying to find ways to protect that experience and make it the best possible for athletes."

That support for the mission and values of intercollegiate athletics has been key in convincing FARs, athletics directors, senior woman administrators and conference officers within the NCAA structure to take the COIA seriously. The group also has established key links with the Association of Governing Boards and the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics.

NCAA President Myles Brand has backed the group, saying, "It is important, in my view, that the COIA be visible and public in reinforcing the sense that faculty members will act with integrity when dealing with student-athletes and the athletics programs."

And the COIA is taking reform seriously, especially since faculty oversight of the curriculum has been identified as an important cog in the reform machine. One of the criticisms of reform, in fact, is that the renewed emphasis on eligibility standards will tempt athletics personnel to shuttle athletes into majors that require less work -- or worse, prompt an increase in academic fraud.

Brand has pointed to the faculty as the group to prove the critics wrong. "The COIA document outlines a strong but realistic position on central issues in intercollegiate athletics," he said. "At the same time, it also provides the correct response to critics who argue that the new, raised academic standards instituted by the NCAA will lead to increases in cheating."

Collecting academic data

The COIA's reform document -- about two years in the making -- contains three proposals, one of which provides the tools necessary for faculty to do the job the academic reform structure implores them to do: maintain curricular integrity.



The COIA wants NCAA legislation to require campuses to collect data on the enrollment and grading patterns of students in individual sports programs. Such data would be designed to reveal clusters of athletes enrolled in identical courses or in courses with identical instructors, unusually high grade-point averages in such courses or from such instructors, or grades significantly higher than predicted for athletes as compared to other students. The goal is to scan for patterns of faculty behavior that might indicate that academic standards are being compromised.

Once those data are collected -- and they would be done so ensuring the anonymity of individual students to the degree provided by law -- they would go to the campus faculty governance body or the campus athletics board to be acted upon as those groups see fit.

Eno said it currently is difficult for faculty to identify where academic fraud exists. Courses typically are adopted on the basis of course proposals, he said, and performance in the classroom tends to be monitored for the purposes of working with professors for tenure or promotion, not for an academic review among student demographics.

"Right now, faculty don't have the tools necessary to ensure that their curriculum has integrity," Eno said. "This bylaw change is the mechanism to do it. We need to have the information about which courses athletes are enrolling in, what their grades are and how those grades relate to the grades other students are getting in those courses."

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Eno said if campus oversight groups see clustering of athlete enrollments or grades of athletes that look to be out of line with what they would expect relative to other data, then that would be reason for those committees to take a closer look. From that point, it would be up to the individual campus committee -- not the NCAA -- to figure out how to pursue those issues and take any action.

"This proposal would allow us to fulfill the function that the NCAA is optimistically hoping that faculty can fulfill," Eno said. "I think faculty over time will be willing to do this and do it well, but we can't do it until we have the tools."

Automatic scholarship renewal

While that proposal focuses more on faculty behavior, a second key is on encouraging and protecting student-athlete performance through an automatic renewal of athletics grants-in-aid.

The COIA wants athletics scholarships to be awarded on a year-by-year basis with the presumption that they will be renewed up to four times for a total of five years, or until graduation. The only way the bond could be broken would be if the student-athlete falls out of academic standing or breaks campus or athletics department codes of behavior. If the scholarship is revoked, though, the final authority for the decision would rest with the chief academic officer, not with the coach or the athletics director.

"What we really want to do is to switch the default on the issue of scholarship renewal," Eno said. He said if athletes know their scholarships can be terminated after any season for athletics reasons, they're bound to respond by prioritizing athletics over academics. "In other words," he said, "their access to academics depends on their athletics performance. This is not something we want to see in our athletics programs."

Under that premise, the COIA at least wants to ensure that the student-athlete's overall interests -- and the primacy of academic pursuits -- is maintained.

"We're trying to protect students and allow them to compete in an athletics program with the expectation that if they live up to their part of the agreement, the school will also," Shepherd said.

Eno added, "Schools don't administer the athletics programs for athletics performance; they run them as educational enhancements. And it will work that way for our athletes only if they can focus fundamentally on their roles as students, then work out their athletics pursuits so that they're consistent with the commitment to getting a good education."

Lobbying for momentum

Faculty leaders think the scholarship proposal has some momentum. It isn't the first time that the renewal concept has been discussed; in fact, the Division I Student-Athlete Advisory Committee has supported the idea before.

Ironically, though, the proposal to collect data by which the faculty would in effect monitor itself may face some resistance.

In some ways, that part of the COIA legislative package resembles the recent effort from the National Association of Basketball Coaches, which submitted legislation last year and had to lobby the Division I governance structure aggressively to educate NCAA policymakers about the legitimacy of the proposals, and in some cases to simply build trust.

One of the hurdles for the basketball coaches was their own unanimity. Early on, there was resistance to some of the proposals from coaches who thought they would benefit only the high-profile programs. The NABC membership, in essence, had to trust itself before it could earn the trust of others.

Similarly, for the COIA data-collection proposal to work, the faculty is going to have to trust itself, too, since the data would prompt an inward look.

University of Michigan FAR Percy Bates, who chairs a newly created Division I-A faculty athletics representative group, said, "There may be some level of resistance to the notion that putting sunshine on what people are doing will keep them from doing it."

"It's a difficult issue for faculty to address," Eno added, "because we operate under a type of social system that grants enormous independence on the judgment of tenured members of the faculty. And we don't like to undercut that academic freedom by supervising one another and checking up on the quality of our instruction -- it's something that is not natural to the faculty culture."

"But it is essential if we're going to address the issue of potential academic fraud."

Other concepts and best practices

The third legislative proposal in the COIA package is to amend NCAA legislation to disallow divided competitive seasons, which the COIA said requires athletes to miss class for road games during both semesters of the academic year. Winter sports such as basketball and ice hockey would not be affected, since their seasons are contiguous, but fall baseball and other nontraditional seasons would be targeted under this proposal.

In addition to legislative suggestions, the document also contains dozens of recommendations for best practices for schools to consider and adapt according to individual needs, or general calls for action on the part of Division I institutions.

Among them:

* Undertaking a systematic study of the success rate of athletes transferring from junior colleges and of problems particular to this transition, with the goal of providing information that can help guide schools in admissions decisions and effective advising.

* Ensuring that campus policies concerning accommodations that are granted to students when they are representing the institution be clearly codified and conveyed to all faculty.

* Awarding academic credit for participation in varsity sports only if specifically approved by the campus faculty in its supervisory role over curriculum. Any such credit should not exceed a small number of total hours toward a degree, such as 2 or 3 percent, and should be assigned only on a pass-fail basis. Faculty-approved procedures should be developed to monitor the awarding of such credit and to address any cases of abuse that may arise.

* Establishing clear policies regarding how the academic success of athletes bears on coaches' job descriptions, and how academic performance will be weighed in reviews and personnel decisions regarding coaching staffs.

* Urging a continued review of present limits on the length of a sport's season, to determine the number of contests necessary to accomplish the basic goals of each sport. NCAA limits on regular-season competition should be adjusted to match those recommendations. Adjustments that are warranted on academic grounds must be made regardless of the financial implications; if it is found that the season schedule of a revenue sport, such as basketball, is creating challenges to academic success that realistically are too demanding for athletes to meet, its length must be reduced.

The COIA document also includes general statements about other hot-button issues in athletics. For example, the COIA is against pay for play, saying, "The athlete who represents an institution does so as a representative of the student body, engaging in an extracurricular activity designed to enhance his or her academic experience. If these activities were not of direct benefit to the student participant, there would be no rationale for supporting them."

The document even provides an entire section on the structure and reporting lines of the institution's academic-advising component.

In all, the document figures to be widely read over the next several months. "I think the timing is right," Shepherd said of the faculty alliance with NCAA reform. "If we are told that curricular integrity is our responsibility, then we certainly should have a place at the table."

That table currently is being set. The NCAA membership services staff will provide a link on the academic reform section and the FAR page of the NCAA Web site, and the document will be sent directly to Division I conference compliance officers. It also will be part of the Division I Academics/Eligibility/Compliance Cabinet's June meeting agenda. COIA members hope the cabinet will submit the proposals into the 2005-06 legislative cycle.

After that, class should be in session, with the final exam set for April 2006 when the Division I Board of Directors would vote on the measures.

Eno hopes that the Division I governance bodies are willing to listen between now and then. For the NCAA reform effort to be successful, he said, the Association is going to have to mobilize the major constituencies that have long-term interests in the educational institutions and a commitment to their mission.

"Faculty is that group," he said. "Our careers are tied to this -- we do this as a life effort because of our commitment to the academic mission, and we believe that the value of intercollegiate athletics is that it can contribute to that mission. If we have good faculty input and there is a cooperative effort on reform between our administrations and the NCAA, the problems we're talking about can be solved, no matter how hard they are."

COIA's strategic partnership targets action, not agitation

Though it hasn't been around long, the Coalition for Intercollegiate Athletics is quickly making a name for itself among faculty-based groups intent on reforming college sports.

People might think of the more publicly known Drake Group when the words "faculty" and "reform" are used in the same sentence, but the three-year-old COIA should not be confused with its six-year-old counterpart, even though the two groups share some of the same members and ideas.

The Drake Group, which defines itself as "a network of college faculty that lobbies aggressively for proposals that ensure quality education for college athletes," hasn't been shy about using the bully pulpit for that purpose, but the COIA seems to have galvanized more faculty members through its partnership approach.

In effect, the COIA is interested in the same types of issues as the Drake Group, or the Faculty Athletics Representatives Association (FARA), which has enjoyed a long and productive relationship with the NCAA. The core areas of concern still are academic integrity, fiscal integrity, student-athlete well-being, proper campus oversight of athletics and guarding against over-commercialization in college sports.

But the difference between the COIA and the Drake Group in particular is that its members openly support the values of intercollegiate athletics, even though they have no ties with athletics. COIA members for the most part are faculty who have been appointed to serve on their campus senates; thus, there is no conflict of interest. It is not a watchdog group, but -- as its name indicates -- a coalition.

Co-chair Bob Eno said the COIA regards the Drake Group as neither a competitor nor an adversary. The drafting committee that initially formulated the COIA's recent positions on academics and athletics in fact contained Drake Group leaders, and a key COIA legislative proposal -- that of mandating the collection of data on athlete enrollments and grades -- is an iteration of what the Drake Group has long advocated as "academic disclosure."

Eno said if and when comprehensive academic reform is achieved, the Drake Group will be owed recognition for its role in the effort. But the Drake Group's politics often have been the stumbling block in establishing a productive relationship with the NCAA governance structure. Realizing that, the COIA is taking a more strategic approach.

One of the groups to provide both buy-in and guidance for the COIA is the Division I-A FAR group chaired by the University of Michigan's Percy Bates. While that group still functions in partnership with the larger FARA, the I-A members established their own group last year -- not so much out of rebellion, but because of the reform initiatives unique to Division I-A that needed a more specific I-A faculty focus.

The I-A group has helped the COIA understand what it might take to accomplish its goals through the complicated and diverse Division I governance structure. Bates said, "There was an early agreement that the COIA and the I-A FARs would work together, which would allow the FARs to talk historically about what ideas might be accepted and what wouldn't."

"COIA members also recognized that they were coming from the outside and needed an inside source to process what they wanted to accomplish. One of the benefits of bringing the FARs, the athletics directors and the COIA together was that it gave the COIA a chance to see up close that some of their issues also were our issues -- and that they are not easy issues to deal with."

But Bates believes the COIA has -- because of its patient approach and because of its stated commitment to the values of athletics as a component of higher education -- earned a voice in the NCAA reform discussion.

"In the beginning, some of the noise from the COIA sounded a lot like the Drake Group," Bates said. "But the COIA went directly to faculty senates, which gave them a different level of credibility. Unlike the Drake Group, the COIA's willingness to talk and understand what the issues are -- and not to believe that none of us from the inside had ever thought about them -- was a critical point of separation."

"There are procedures to go through to get things done. There's a big difference between wanting to make a statement and really wanting to get some real reform accomplished. It's not that the Drake Group would not want to get reform accomplished, it's just that their methods and techniques have not lent themselves to a level of getting something done."

-- Gary T. Brown

COIA proposals

Though many of the concepts contained in the Coalition for Intercollegiate Athletics document focus on academic integrity in athletics, the following are actual proposals for legislative changes. For them to enter the 2005-06 Division I legislative cycle, an NCAA conference or governance body (most likely the Division I Academics/Eligibility/Compliance Cabinet) would have to officially submit them on the COIA's behalf by July 15.

- Athletics scholarships shall be awarded on a year-by-year basis with the presumption that they will be renewed up to four times for a total award of five years, or until graduation, whichever comes first, for students who are in good academic standing, conform to campus codes for student behavior, conform to the athletics department's standards of conduct, and adhere to team rules. If a student graduates in fewer than five years, an institution may renew the scholarship if the student has athletics eligibility remaining. Institutions shall establish criteria and a mechanism for revoking a scholarship. The final authority for revoking a scholarship shall rest with the chief academic officer. A student awarded an athletics scholarship who is no longer participating in athletics will be counted against the NCAA maximum number of awards for that sport, unless the scholarship is revoked.
- Campuses shall collect data on athlete enrollments and grades by course section, including indication of course GPAs, and data on choice of majors, for each individual sport, and shall convey that information to the campus Faculty Governance Body, ensuring that the anonymity of individual students is protected to the degree provided by law. Where no campus Faculty Governance Body exists, the information shall be conveyed to the Campus Athletics Board.

- NCAA bylaws should be amended so that divided competition seasons are not permitted.

The entire document is available at <http://coia.umd.edu>.

View online at:

http://www.ncaa.org/wps/portal/newsdetail?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/wps/wcm/connect/NCAA/NCAA+News/NCAA+News+Online/2005/Division+I/Faculty+group+present

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