

Close Print

Faculty integral to instilling integrity within academic reform

February 14, 2005

By Myles Brand

In the years it has taken to develop and adopt enhanced standards that hold institutions accountable for the academic progress and graduation of student-athletes, one truth has remained constant: Academic reform is not a solitary endeavor.

Helpful Links

 [Email this article](#)

 [Print this article](#)

Indeed, successfully enacting and implementing the sweeping measures in effect for Division I requires buy-in and oversight from almost every level of higher education -- from presidents and chancellors to conference commissioners and athletics directors to coaches and student-athletes, and -- importantly -- to faculty members on each campus.

The significance of faculty endorsement of academic reform cannot be overstated. One of the more frequent challenges from critics regarding reform is that the new academic rules will lead to increased cheating and the lowering of standards. Cynics claim that coaches and academic advisors, in a quest to keep student-athletes eligible under the tougher scale, will steer athletes into less-demanding majors or coursework that requires little effort, or worse, cheating.

The reason that is a poor argument is because of the integrity of the faculty. Faculty members on each campus are responsible for the quality of education, for the integrity of the courses and majors that are available to all students, not just student-athletes. Faculty members own the curriculum -- they have oversight of courses and majors, and they have the authority to cull out those that do not meet the academic rigors of the institutional mission. That is one of the reasons why the academic reforms currently in place will be successful -- because faculty members will protect the integrity of the curriculum.

One faculty-based group is reiterating that message to faculty at all Division I campuses. The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) is in the process of drafting a white paper of recommended best practices that ensure academic integrity under the new reform standards. It also is asking for NCAA legislation in a few areas. The COIA is an alliance of more than 40 Division I faculty senates that has pledged support of the reform movement in intercollegiate athletics. Its latest effort implores faculty at the grass-roots level to maintain the principle that academic achievement and participation in athletics are not in conflict.

The COIA is poised to combine efforts with faculty athletics representatives to deliver this message. FARs already have played and will continue to play a vital role in the academic-reform movement, and such alliances with other faculty will only serve to bolster those efforts.

The COIA is recommending a comprehensive approach of best practices, and some legislative proposals, that go well beyond what currently is in place at most campuses. COIA members deserve credit for having researched and consulted widely about intercollegiate athletics, and these serious proposals aimed at improving the academic integrity in college sports are indicative of that effort.

The recommendations target admissions, scholarships, curricular integrity, academic advising and student-athlete time demands. Most of the recommendations are in the form of best practices, and they range from encouraging stringent criteria for admission of scholarship athletes to tightened parameters for awarding academic credit for participation in varsity sports. They also address policies regarding student-athlete time demands, philosophies concerning the scheduling of contests during weekdays, and the creation of on-campus oversight groups to monitor academic integrity.

There also are a few proposals to modify NCAA bylaws, and I support these ideas being forwarded through normal channels for membership discussion and, potentially, action. Even though some of the concepts may be controversial, they deserve consideration. For example, the COIA advocates that NCAA legislation require athletics scholarships to be awarded on a year-by-year basis with the presumption that they will be renewed for five years, or until graduation, whichever comes first. Institutions would be responsible for establishing criteria under which a scholarship could be revoked, but the final authority would rest with the institution's chief academic officer. This is a significantly different paradigm than that which currently exists, and the concept deserves honest discussion.

A second legislative proposal would require campuses to collect data on enrollment and grading patterns of student-athletes in individual sports programs, ensuring that the anonymity of individual students is protected to the degree provided by law. The COIA believes such research could indicate instances in which the academic integrity of the curriculum is being compromised. This, too, is a concept worthy of membership review.

But not only does the document address how the faculty monitors the curriculum, it also takes on how the faculty monitors itself. To the COIA's credit, it acknowledges at least the anecdotal evidence that some instructors treat student-athletes differently than other students by not allowing them to make up work missed during team travel periods, even though similar provisions are afforded to others in the student body. This is an issue that has continually been raised during my many discussions with campus and national student-athlete advisory committee members over the last two years. Though the occurrences of unfair treatment are not frequent, such behavior -- when it does occur -- permeates the campus and affects many student-athletes' regard for their own education. To that end, the COIA recommends that faculty governance groups ensure that campus policies concerning accommodations granted to all students be clearly conveyed to all faculty members.

The totality of the COIA recommendations represents a significant effort from a group critical to the success of the reform movement. The white paper should be finalized in the coming weeks, and the full membership of the COIA will vote on its contents early this spring. I expect the recommendations for best practices to be at the forefront of many faculty discussions in the next year.

It will be important for the COIA to continue to work hand-in-hand with the Faculty Athletics Representatives Association, Division I athletics directors, the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics and the Association of Governing Boards, groups with which the COIA already has established meaningful partnerships. The more constituents who work in a concerted effort to accomplish our goals, the better. As I said, academic reform cannot be achieved by any one group working in seclusion. Faculty involvement in the implementation of stricter standards -- and faculty oversight of the academic integrity of the institution -- is a critical piece of the reform puzzle.

I am confident that through efforts such as the one being undertaken by the COIA, the integrity of the academic-reform movement will be secure.

Myles Brand is president of the NCAA.

View online at:

http://www.ncaa.org/wps/portal/newsdetail?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/wps/wcm/connect/NCAA/NCAA+News/NCAA+News+Online/2005/Editorial/Faculty+integral+to+insti

Copyright © 2004 by NCAA

Further reproduction is prohibited without express written permission from NCAA.