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

Introduction and List of Specific Proposals

Introduction

There are three primary rationales for intercollegiate athletics: 1) for the athlete, the discipline and values of sports can contribute to personal development reinforcing academic excellence; 2) for the campus, the ceremonies and competition of intercollegiate sports can contribute to community and institutional loyalty; 3) for the college and university community, college sports can broaden positive interest in and public support for higher education.

While the experience of the past century has frequently called into question whether these ideals have a close relationship to the practice of college sports, the Coalition for Intercollegiate Athletics has adopted these principles as goals in its advocacy of intercollegiate athletics reform. College sports should be pursued in a way that supports these claims for its value. If that has not generally been the case in the past, we need to change our practices.

None of the values ascribed to college sports can be realized if we abandon the principle that personal development through athletics participation and academic achievement are linked. Yet experience suggests that in many sports programs, academic goals are treated as subordinate, and in a variety of ways students are encouraged or enabled to let their athletics commitment undermine their academic work. To the degree that athletics undermines academic integrity, it reflects a cynical attitude towards the ideals of college sports and of higher education.

It is a norm of long standing in higher education governance that the faculty bears primary responsibility for maintaining the academic standards of institutions. For this reason, the COIA, as a faculty governance based coalition devoted to athletics reform, has developed the following set of proposals and guidelines to help faculty fulfill their responsibilities with regard to the impact of athletics on academic standards and integrity.

Although this document includes many proposals, only three are suggested as rules, or NCAA bylaws, that should apply to all schools. The great majority are intended as best practice guidelines – policies that have worked well in practice at some schools or, in some cases, new ideas that are shared because they promise to address difficult problems that have resisted solution. The object is not to prescribe what schools must do, but to suggest issues that schools need to consider and approaches that may with adaptation fit local needs and strengthen the way athletics supports the educational mission. Where other local practices already accomplish the goal of academic integrity, those may in fact constitute best practices for that institution.
The Coalition is an alliance of over forty-five NCAA Division IA faculty senates, and proposals and recommendations in this document are intended to apply only to Division IA schools, although in the case of proposed NCAA bylaw changes, the NCAA structure requires that proposals apply to all of Division I. It is our hope, however, that to the degree that these ideas articulate well founded principles, they will be of use to all schools that engage in intercollegiate sports.

The recommendations are in five sections:

1. Admissions
2. Scholarships
3. Curricular Integrity
4. Time Commitment, Missed Class Time, and Scheduling of Competitions
5. Policies Concerning the Office of Academic Advising for Athletes

Boldface numbers indicate proposals for NCAA bylaw changes (there are three altogether: 2.1, 3.1, 4.3.2). Other proposals are best-practice guidelines for schools to consider and adapt according to local needs and judgments, or general calls for action on the part of Division IA schools.

1. Admissions

1.1 Campus administrations and Faculty Governance Bodies should develop policies setting criteria for admission of scholarship athletes. These criteria should be set with regard to both minimum standards for regular admissions and average qualifications of entering students. They can and generally should be above NCAA minimum limits.

1.2 Campus administrations and Faculty Governance Bodies should develop policies that set standard criteria for special admissions, consistent with maintaining academic integrity in special admissions balanced for all groups selected for admission, including special admissions for athletes, either for all sports programs taken together, or for individual programs. Efforts to obtain and maintain diversity in the campus population of athletes should not be compromised, so that athletes of all races, classes, and genders have access to the university.

1.3 The Campus Athletics Board should receive information on all scholarship athlete admits, and should annually certify to the campus Faculty Governance Body compliance with these policies.

1.4 Campuses should develop means to track and share with the Faculty Governance Body the academic performance of scholarship athletes who enroll through special admissions, to permit better understanding of how successfully the campus supports the academic needs of these students and what costs to the campus this may involve. Faculty Governance Bodies should also be provided with data concerning the academic progress
of all athletes, allowing them to assess the range of admissions qualifications appropriate to athletes, adhering in all cases to the requirements of protections under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

1.5 Analogous policies and procedures should be developed to govern admission of transfer students who are scholarship athletes.

1.6 The NCAA is encouraged to compile data and undertake 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. Such a study should include a survey of the impact of recent NCAA academic reforms on junior college transfer students.

2. Scholarships

2.1 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 athletic 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.

3. Curricular Integrity

3.1 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.

3.2 Campus administrators and Faculty Governance Bodies should develop policies and procedures specifying the format in which such data will be presented, and the degree to which the data shall be made public or restricted, adhering in all cases to the requirements of FERPA protections.

3.3 The Faculty Governance Body should create a committee on academic integrity, specifically assigned to review and interpret data collected concerning athlete enrollment and grade patterns, in order to determine whether data consistent with a failure of
3.4 Campus administrators and Faculty Governance Bodies should develop policies and procedures allowing for investigation of problematic data concerning athlete enrollment or GPA patterns, and for remediation, if deemed necessary. The goal of these policies should be to ensure that faculty and advisors associated with all campus programs are maintaining standards of academic integrity with regard to students participating in intercollegiate athletics programs. Policies should include guidelines that will help assure that data are interpreted in a manner that is well informed and sensitive to patterns of student enrollment and performance independent of athletics.

3.5 Faculty Governance Bodies should ensure that campus policies concerning accommodations to be granted students in the course of their representation of the institution be clearly codified and conveyed to all faculty. Procedures for reporting violations of these policies should be clearly stipulated and conveyed to all students, and mechanisms developed for mediation and adjudication.

3.6 Campus administrations and Faculty Governance Bodies should develop policies regarding whether athletes can enroll in credit courses taught by a coach or other member of the athletics department staff. If permitted, campus administrations and Faculty Governance Bodies should develop procedures for monitoring enrollment, credit, and grades of athletes and non-athletes to minimize any appearance of or actual conflict of interest.

3.7 When an athlete is permitted to enroll in a course taught by his or her coach, that coach should not participate in any grade assignment for that athlete. Faculty Governance Bodies should consider whether such policies should be extended to cover assignment of grades by a coach to athletes in other varsity sports.

3.8 Academic credit may be awarded 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 degree, such as 2-3 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.

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

4.1 Total time commitment

4.1.1 Head coaches must share accountability for the academic achievement of the athletes they select for admissions consideration. Data on continuing eligibility and graduation rates of each recruiting class brought by individual head coaches to their institutions should be maintained, relevant to the period during which the coach was
employed at that institution and according to uniform standards, to establish a public record of the academic success of each coach. This record should follow a coach from institution to institution.

4.1.2 The campus administration and athletics department, in consultation with the Campus Athletics Board, should establish 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. Campus procedures should allow the Campus Athletics Board or its personnel subcommittee to review policy implementation, and to report annually to the campus administration and Faculty Governance Body its assessment of the integrity with which these policies are implemented.

4.1.3 Procedures for exit interviews with athletes should include a focus on issues pertaining to compliance with the twenty-hour rule, and these data should be considered by the Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR) and Campus Athletics Board in assessments of program integrity.

4.2 Calendar approval procedures

4.2.1 Each campus should develop a set of principles concerning norms and limits of missed class time that should guide annual approval decisions in each sport. These principles should be developed in consultation with the FAR, the Campus Athletics Board, and the Faculty Governance Body.

4.2.2 Each conference should develop a set of principles concerning norms and limits of missed class time that should guide annual approval decisions in each sport. These principles should be developed by conference FARs, in consultation with their Campus Athletics Boards and Faculty Governance Bodies, and should not be less restrictive than campus-based principles of conference members.

4.2.3 Annual conference competition schedules should be in accord with conference principles on missed class time and be adopted only with approval by conference FARs, who should be consulted on all conference scheduling plans and options at a point early enough that their views will affect the final plan offered for their approval.

4.2.4 Annual non-conference competition schedules should accord with individual campus principles on missed class time and be adopted only with approval by the Campus Athletics Board, which should be consulted on all conference scheduling plans and options at a point early enough that its views will affect the final plan offered for their approval.

4.3 Season length and scheduling

4.3.1 The NCAA should continue to review the present limits on regular season length, in order to determine the number of competitions necessary to accomplish the basic goals
of each sport. NCAA limits on regular season competitions should be adjusted to match these 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 too demanding for athletes realistically to meet, its length must be reduced.

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

4.3.3 In recent years athletics schedules have expanded in at least the following additional two ways, which impinge on the academic schedule: 1) seasons have been expanded at the beginning and at the end, particularly with regard to the proliferation of post-season conference tournaments, 2) athletic events have increasingly been scheduled on weekdays. The Coalition urges the NCAA and the conferences to begin reversing these trends. We recognize that for some universities and in some sports, this goal may remain elusive and that the process may require as long as a decade to accomplish.

4.3.4 Institutions should not permit cancellation of campuswide classes for an athletics event. We urge the NCAA Division IA membership to explore ways in which this can become a uniformly observed principle.

4.3.5 The NCAA should collect data and develop norms governing maximum times before and after competitions that travel schedules may permit. Such policy should include guidelines for exceptional cases and a waiver procedure, but should establish uniformity in the priority given to minimizing missed class days.

4.3.6 An institution shall not schedule athletics competitions during final exam periods on that school’s campus; conferences shall develop their schedules to accommodate the final exam calendars of all member institutions.

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

5.1. Organization.

5.1.1 The OAAA should report directly to the campus office of academic affairs. Campuses may choose to have a secondary reporting line to the Director of Athletics, but primary control over academic advising must derive from the chief academic officer of the campus.

5.1.2 The OAAA should work closely with the FAR.

5.1.3 The OAAA should be represented by its Director on a regularly convened committee that monitors the relationship between athletics programs and campus academic and support units, bringing together administrative officers and others responsible for key elements of athlete support and services, such as the Registrar, Bursar,
Athletics Director, FAR, Compliance Offer, and a high academic administrator. The OAAA Director and FAR should have the prerogative to introduce agenda items.

5.1.4 The OAAA should collaborate closely with other campus advising units.

5.1.5 The OAAA should collaborate closely with other campus student support units.

5.1.6 The OAAA should have a clearly defined mission statement, consistent with that of the campus, which specifies the centrality of academic integrity to the unit mission.

5.1.7 The OAAA should develop regular and frequent internal self-assessment procedures for all its programs, and work with the campus to arrange periodic campus assessments of its academic advising and athlete services components, to ensure successful external NCAA certification reviews.

5.2. Personnel.

A. Director.

5.2.1 The Director should have a Master’s or Doctoral degree in student counseling or a related field.

5.2.2 The Director should have prior experience in student counseling, personnel and budget management, and athletics, with a history of rules compliance and commitment to ethical practices.

5.2.3 The Director should have independence in developing and implementing policies related to academic advising, subject to the supervision of the campus office of academic affairs.

5.2.4 The Director should be directly responsible for the development of program budgets, allocation of unit resources, assignment of advisor case loads and other unit duties, and all unit personnel decisions.

5.2.5 The Director should be responsible for designing and supervising advisor training programs.

5.2.6 The Director should have final authority over advising staff, under the supervision of the campus chief academic officer, subject only to usual institutional rules governing the authority and responsibility of unit heads.

5.2.7 The Director should have appropriate and specified authority over support staff.

5.2.8 The Director should be responsible for designing and supervising tutor and mentor training programs.
5.2.9 The salary of the Director, and of all positions in the OAAA, should be determined by the office of academic affairs, with due regard for the specialized skills and work schedules of OAAA personnel, external market conditions, and issues of campus equity.

B. Academic Advisors.

5.2.10 OAAA Advisors should preferably have a Master’s degree in student counseling or a related field, and experience in student counseling.

5.2.11 Advisors should participate in professional development opportunities.

5.2.12 Advisors should participate in on-campus training provided by other campus academic or advising units.

5.2.13 Advisors should be assigned manageable case loads.

5.2.14 No advisor should report directly to a coach.

5.2.15 A single advisor should not serve as the sole advisor assigned to work with a specific team; multiple advisors should share team advising duties. There are many conveniences to assigning all members of a team to a single advisor; however, there is significant potential for the authority and independence of advisors to be undermined, and the assignment of multiple advisors to teams is a best practice designed to improve conditions for academic integrity.

5.2.16 Advisors should communicate closely with advisors in athletes’ major departments, in order to ensure that athletes receive consistent and accurate counseling.

5.2.17 Advisors should review and have the option to endorse petitions for NCAA academic waivers.

5.2.18 Academic advisors, not coaches, should be the contact point between the athletics department and instructors. Coaches should be forbidden from initiating contact with instructors regarding the academic progress or status of individual students.

5.2.19 Academic advisors, not coaches, should have the primary responsibility in the athlete’s selection of major and specific courses.

C. Other Appointees.

5.2.20 Learning specialists, life-skill coordinators, and other additional staff should be appointed to manage major OAAA program activities apart from academic advising, as necessary. These positions may be shared with other campus student services units to maximize efficient use of resources.
5.3. Programmatic Functions

A. Academic Advising.

The OAAA should perform the following functions:

5.3.1 Re-assessment of newly enrolled athletes’ abilities and skills.

5.3.2 Academic counseling for academic progress.

5.3.3 Monitoring and tracking academic progress during semester and towards degree completion.

5.3.4 Assisting students in identifying career goals and choosing a major.

5.3.5 Offering assistance in course scheduling.

5.3.6 Monitoring issues of academic eligibility.

5.3.7 Monitoring issues of athletic eligibility.

B. Academic Support Services

The OAAA should provide the following academic support services:

5.3.8 Specialized programming and assistance for the freshman transition.

5.3.9 Assistance to students in developing academic planning and time management skills.

5.3.10 Mentoring for at-risk students.

5.3.11 Access to tutors and, when appropriate, mentors.

5.3.12 Training and supervision for tutors and mentors.

5.3.13 Other appropriate learning interventions.

5.3.14 Study facilities available and accessible to athletes.

5.3.15 Laptop computer loans for athletics travel.

5.3.16 Priority registration services.

C. Athlete Support Services
By providing a range of the following support services to athletes the OAAA can reinforce its overall function in promoting academic strength:

5.3.17 Programs for or assistance concerning transition out of collegiate sports.

5.3.18 Information on campus programs and services relating to: life skills development, career exploration, career skills assessment, job search preparation, graduate school application, internships, and so forth. Where campus services may not exist, the OAAA may advocate for them, or provide independent services for athletes.

5.3.19 Support for the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC).

5.3.20 Organization of appropriate community service activities for athletes.

5.3.21 Academic awards ceremonies and other activities to recognize academic accomplishments and create additional incentives.

5.3.22 A substance abuse education program that addresses alcohol abuse, performance enhancing drug abuse, recreational drug abuse, and other forms of substance abuse, or participates in campuswide programs.

5.3.23 A media education program.

5.3.24 Internship or graduate assistantship programs related to athletics.

5.3.25 Programs to educate athletes concerning agents and NCAA and campus rules governing contact with them.

5.3.26 Programs in diversity awareness; the OAAA may participate in campuswide programs.

5.3.27 A gambling abuse education program.

5.3.28 Programs on sexual harassment and sexual misconduct awareness; the OAAA may participate in campuswide programs.