

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 supports these goals. However, these values cannot be realized if we abandon the principle that personal development through athletics participation and academic achievement are 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.

1. Admissions.

- At many schools, the admissions process for athletes is exceptional, and faculty do 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, and that faculty governance bodies 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 all athlete academic performance 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.
- 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 recommends campuses establish policies and procedures with regard to these issues, and that NCAA standards require that suitable data be collected, preserving student anonymity, and be made available to faculty committees implementing such policies.
- 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, and also 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, we recommend 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. We recommend that FARs 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, and we recommend 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, we recommend that non-traditional seasons be ended, and we note that the increase in weekday competitions is also in conflict with academic goals.
- 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. There is a natural and inevitable tension between this mission and the competitive goals of coaches and athletes themselves. The OAAA should be structured in such a way as to maximize its ability to manage this tension successfully. The most basic recommendation of the Coalition in this regard is 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, we recommend 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.