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Recent reform initiatives have offered ideas for improving academic and financial oversight, but the ideas do not always conform to faculty perceptions and opinions.

Athletics Reform and Faculty Perceptions

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Since their inception, intercollegiate athletics have engendered controversy and stimulated debate (Thelin, 1996). Supporters assert that “college sports are significant in defining the essence of the American college and university” (Toma, 1999, p. 82), suggesting that benefits associated with athletics include more increased fundraising (Grimes and Chressanthis, 1994), positive public perceptions of graduates (Lovaglia and Lucas, 2005), and goodwill in the local community (Toma, 1999). Athletics is meanwhile condemned for devaluing the core academic mission, being excessively commercial, and permitting unethical and even scandalous behavior (Bok, 2003; Duderstadt, 2003; Shulman and Bowen, 2002). Accordingly, there have been calls for reform over the decades (Thelin, 1996). In the early 1990s, these emphasized enhancing presidential leadership (Knight Commission, 1991, 2001). Recent proposals have called for faculty involvement in reforming college sports, at the national and local levels (COIA, 2005; Splitt, 2004).

In this chapter, we review the calls by three national organizations for faculty-led reform of intercollegiate athletics, as well as the positions they have taken, organized into three categories: academic oversight, faculty governance, and fiscal oversight. We then draw on our own work, considering

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faculty perspectives on governance and oversight of intercollegiate athletics in relation to the proposed reforms.

Faculty Members and Intercollegiate Athletics

Few scholars have focused on faculty perceptions of intercollegiate athletics (Cockley and Roswal, 1994). Engstrand (1995) reported that faculty at a large institution in Division I of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) believe that athletics is disconnected from the academic mission, echoing the critiques of national reform groups, while downgrading the importance of athletic goals. When asked to characterize what they believe the goals of the intercollegiate athletics program should be, faculty members contend that academic achievement by athletes is central (Trail and Chelladurai, 2000), along with character development and physical well-being. They further perceive athletics to negatively affect the overall academic reputation (Briody, 1996). However, Engstrand (1995) found that some faculty recognize the positive contributions of athletics, believing it provides student entertainment, develops positive personal characteristics in athletes, and promotes alumni support. Easter (1997) similarly discovered that some faculty did not see a conflict between athletics and the university. In short, faculty views of intercollegiate athletics are anything but homogeneous (Putler and Wolfe, 1999; Wolfe and Putler, 2002).

Variations in faculty opinions are attributable to institutional and individual differences. Faculty employed at Division I institutions, in which athletics are more prominent, are less satisfied with facets of athletics than are faculty from Divisions II, III, or the NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) institutions (Cockley and Roswal, 1994). In addition, compared to faculty from Division III institutions, those at Division I are more likely to agree that faculty members resent athletics and that athletics engages in practices of questionable ethics (Engstrand, 1995). Winning may also have an influence. Noble (2004) concludes that compared to faculty at institutions with low athletic success, faculty at institutions with more successful programs have more favorable attitudes about athletics.

Individual characteristics, such as length of service at an institution, may also temper faculty views. Faculty who have been employed at their institution for five years or less are more likely than colleagues with longer tenure to agree that a winning athletic team unifies their campus (Engstrand, 1995). Furthermore, men may be more oriented toward athletics reform than women (Kuga, 1996). Field of instruction also seems to influence faculty attitudes; those from kinesiology and physical education have more positive views of the role that athletics plays at their institution and the image of their campus's athletics program (Harrison, 2004; Noble, 2004). Finally, faculty who have more direct contact with athletics are more satisfied with athletic programs, compared to those who are not at all involved (Cockley and Roswal, 1994). In fact, compared to coaches in "revenue producing" sports

and athletics directors, faculty athletics representatives (FAR) in Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions have a significantly more positive attitude toward academic, financial, gender, and social issues related to the athletics on their campus (Friesen, 1992).

National reform efforts call for increasing faculty participation in governance related to athletics (Solow, 1998). However, little empirical work addresses the issue directly, especially the degree to which faculty in general believe they can contribute meaningfully and facilitate change in their campus athletics programs (Frey, 1987; Kuga, 1996). The most commonly cited impediment to becoming involved is the time commitment that faculty perceive is required, although some also worry that they do not have necessary competencies and skills. Among those who hold formal athletics governance positions there is a tendency to believe athletics directors have the most power and influence in the area, more than faculty, presidents, trustees, or alumni (Solow, 1998).

Reform Proposals

Over the past decade, there have been three reports encouraging reform of the faculty role in intercollegiate athletics: by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2002), Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA, 2007), and the NCAA (2006). Each solicited faculty perspectives in developing its recommendations.

In its overall report, titled “The Role of the Faculty in the Governance of College Athletics,” the AAUP, which has not traditionally made intercollegiate athletics a priority, responded to scandals in the area, issuing a series of reports and recommendations beginning in the 1980s. The reports are critical of the increased emphasis on college sports, preferential treatment and the exploitation of athletes, and unethical conduct on the part of coaches, boosters, and athletes. The AAUP asserts that faculty authority over academic matters, especially curriculum and instruction, should extend to student athletes and argues for more faculty involvement in athletics governance and more oversight through faculty senates.

The COIA formed in 2002 with the intention of prompting a national movement of faculty senates to “ensure that athletics enhances rather than undermines the academic mission” (COIA, 2003). In its 2007 report, “A Framework for Comprehensive Athletics Reform,” the COIA encourages faculty involvement in areas related to athletics: academics, student welfare, finances and scale, commercialization, and governance (COIA, 2005). Like the AAUP, the COIA did not conduct empirical research, relying more on anecdotal evidence and quotations from faculty and administrators, while referencing various athletics scandals.

In “The Second Century Imperatives: Presidential Leadership—Institutional Accountability” (2006), the NCAA encourages greater faculty involvement in reforming athletics through their shared governance roles.

In the 1990s, the NCAA shifted oversight responsibility to presidents, as recommended by the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (1991; 2001). However, the task force behind the 2006 NCAA report, comprising fifty chief executives charged with creating an agenda for future action, acknowledged that reforming athletics does not often rise to a priority for presidents and worked from the premise that athletics needs to be better integrated into institutions, both structurally and culturally. It addressed four sets of issues: fiscal responsibility, academic values and standards, presidential leadership of internal and external constituencies, and student athlete well-being.

Reform Priorities and Faculty Perspectives

The recommendations advanced by the AAUP, COIA, and NCAA cluster around three priorities: academic oversight, faculty governance, and fiscal oversight of intercollegiate athletics by faculty.

Academic Oversight. The AAUP draws on its 1966 “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities” to underscore faculty obligations in assuring “academic primacy” in athletics. Faculty are responsible, under the 1966 statement, for those aspects of student life that relate to the educational process, requiring their attention to admissions standards, academic support activities, and programs of study for athletes.

The COIA is more specific about the role of faculty in the academic experience of athletes, beginning with direct oversight of athlete admissions across their institutions. Faculty must ensure what the COIA terms the “primacy of academics,” proposing that athletes be allowed to prioritize academics, leading to graduation, over athletic commitments. The COIA recommends more consistent faculty monitoring of the academic experience of athletes, including requiring annual reports to both faculty senates and athletics boards on patterns of course taking, grades earned, and graduation rate. Related to the welfare of athletes, the COIA proposes minimizing conflict between academic commitments and practices and games, promoting integration of athletes into campus life, and merging academic support and advising programs for athletes into those at the institution generally.

The NCAA report identifies multiple stakeholders who must be involved in athletics reform, especially presidents and chancellors. Faculty responsibility for matters pertaining to the academic integrity of student athletes’ experiences is highlighted along with the function of the faculty athletics representative (FAR) as liaison between athletics and academics. The task force report references several of the policy changes that the COIA proposes, including integrating admissions and academic advising related to athletes into institutional efforts. In doing so, they recommend establishing criteria and policies for special admission of athletes, limiting the number and monitoring special admit students while enrolled.

Our own research involving a Knight Commission–sponsored survey of FBS faculty indicates they believe they have ceded responsibilities for the admissions of all undergraduates to professional staff. Furthermore, large numbers of them answer “don’t know” when asked about particulars pertaining to the special admissions for student athletes (Lawrence, Hendricks, and Ott, 2007). The COIA assumes faculty involvement in ensuring academic integrity in athletics begins with the recruiting process. However, faculty are neither involved nor knowledgeable here. Those who believe they are informed are more satisfied than dissatisfied with the role of coaches in special admissions, but they are, as a group, split evenly in their satisfaction with the academic standards that guide admissions decisions for high school athletes in football and basketball. Faculty say they are more involved with academic advising of undergraduates generally and acknowledge that athletes are advised separately. They tend to be dissatisfied with the academic standards applied in advising athletes, but they are mostly uninformed about faculty monitoring efforts on their campus related to athletes’ programs of study. Faculty with student athletes in their classes are generally satisfied with their academic performance, as well as the academic integrity they exhibit. What most concerns faculty are the time constraints associated with participating on a team, with the majority surveyed perceiving that athletes are more burdened than other students by demands on their out-of-class time.

Faculty Governance. The AAUP contends: “In major programs, athletics often functions as an auxiliary enterprise that generates its own substantial revenues. On many campuses, this has led to a suggestion that the intercollegiate athletic program should not be subject to the same governance structure as are more traditional educational endeavors.” Such an approach is problematic, the association argues, because the core educational mission of the university is not at the forefront and in some cases is even threatened. The AAUP acknowledges that it is unrealistic to hold faculty absolutely responsible for athletics governance. However, as the keepers of academic standards and values, they must have some authority in setting policies and making decisions. The AAUP recommends employing an institution-level athletics committee that includes a substantial representation of faculty elected by their peers. In addition, faculty and administrators should approve institutional representatives such as the FAR.

The COIA also calls for more clarity around the appointment and term of FARs, and it joins the AAUP in recommending a faculty athletics committee with oversight responsibilities. Furthermore, the COIA proposes that faculty leaders be involved in significant decisions related to athletics such as hiring, capital projects, and addition or contraction of sports. The group suggests initiating annual reports from the FAR and athletic director with specific data related to academic benchmarks, as well as faculty governance heads signifying annually to the NCAA that their oversight occurred.

The NCAA task force framed governance as faculty offering counsel and support to presidents and chancellors. Intercollegiate athletics, the

report argues, has moved outside the purview of university governance and institutions must reassert their control. Doing so includes faculty, who have “an indispensable role to play in the integration of athletics departments with the rest of the campus, the development of athletics budgets in accordance with the way in which budgets for the rest of campus are determined, and the support of presidential leadership in aligning athletics with institutional mission and values” (p. 15). The task force added that faculty must become more informed about issues related to athletics, and that current faculty governance structures, namely the FAR locally and the COIA nationally, are valuable models to leverage for improving faculty oversight.

However, our research indicates that faculty assign athletics a low priority relative to other areas under the purview of faculty governance, such as resources for research, undergraduate education, and faculty personnel policies. Although certain reforms that the AAUP, COIA, and NCAA task force recommend target faculty concerns, their challenge is raising athletics to being a priority on the agendas of those involved in faculty governance. Faculty perceive athletics to be largely separate from the institution, essentially an auxiliary enterprise, such as the campus bookstore or food service, that generates its own revenue and is accountable to administrators. They also see little contact between those working in athletics and those involved in academic life. Accordingly, they understand decisions in athletics to be driven by priorities akin to those in the entertainment industry as opposed to academic values. Faculty tend to believe athletics is a separate, commercial enterprise, operating under its own rules.

Furthermore, they have little sense of the extent and nature of faculty oversight over athletics. Nearly one-half surveyed do not know if faculty governance committees advise administrators in developing the annual athletics budget, and two-fifths are unaware of whether faculty appointed to athletics governance committees are those most likely to acquiesce to athletics administrators. Those with an opinion believe faculty to be somewhat interested in governance issues related to intercollegiate athletics, but their responsibilities here are ill defined. On balance, faculty are dissatisfied with the extent and type of involvement they have in governing athletics, as well as the range of faculty perspectives and input on athletics considered by administrators. However, they are relatively satisfied with the willingness of faculty who serve on governance bodies to take positions at odds with those advocated by athletics administrators, and with the attention that their colleagues involved in athletics oversight pay to the quality of the educational experiences of athletes. Those who have served in governance positions involving athletics are significantly more positive about the faculty role in athletics than their colleagues who have never done so. For instance, one-half of faculty with no experience believe athletics decisions to be driven by the priorities of the entertainment industry, while only one-third of those with governance experience hold this view.

Finally, one-half of faculty indicate there is a greater than 50 percent chance that they would agree to join a campus-based athletics reform effort, while one-fifth estimate that there is less than 50 percent chance, and one-tenth state that there is no chance at all. However, only one in ten faculty believe that there is a greater than 50 percent chance that such initiatives would result in meaningful change on their campus. Faculty need to assert their influence if the reforms proposed in the three reports are to be realized, but their confidence in their ability to do so is low.

Fiscal Oversight. As early as the 1929 Carnegie Foundation Bulletin number 23 on Intercollegiate Athletics, reform efforts have targeted greater involvement of faculty in oversight of athletics finances. In its most recent reports, the AAUP focuses more on academic oversight than on financial, but it notes “the economic environment that produced academic and financial improprieties in the past has not substantially changed.” They reference their 1972 “Statement on the Role of the Faculty in Budgetary and Salary Matters,” which asserts the legitimate role of faculty in financial matters across institutions, including budgeting. Such responsibilities extend to athletics programs, especially given the potential academic ramifications of athletics budget decisions. The AAUP also calls for transparency in athletic operations, including finances. The NCAA task force addresses financial concerns extensively, calling for regular production of “clear, concise, and comparable data on athletics finances, so that presidents (but not necessarily faculty) can better understand them” (p. 24). The task force does not suggest national policy reforms emphasizing local control. However, it does recommend improving the advisory role of faculty in planning and financial issues in athletics. COIA expressly endorses the recommendations of the NCAA task force and proposes additional reforms. These include having athletics budgets be consistent with the mission and budget of the institution and determined within the overall institutional budget process.

We conclude in our research that faculty understanding of athletics finances is uneven. Half of them do not know if their institution subsidizes intercollegiate athletics, and slightly more do not know if faculty governance committees advise administrators during the budget process for athletics. Those who believe subsidies occur are mostly dissatisfied with the approach, perhaps recognizing that funds allocated to support athletics could be used for academic purposes. Among faculty in general, intercollegiate athletics is viewed as a mixed financial blessing. Although they believe institutions prioritize and subsidize athletics funding, they also believe that success on the field can attract nonathletic donations. This said, faculty are concerned that the commercialization of college sports is eroding the amateur ideal and further distancing athletics from the values of the university. Faculty are most satisfied with advances in gender equity, which the reform efforts do not consider.

Concluding Thoughts

Empirical research on athletics reforms remains important, as it does in other policy domains. To date none of the three reform policies explicitly based recommendations on data from faculty regarding their potential roles in athletics oversight. Assumptions are often consistent with the views of faculty, and many faculty are not informed, or have detached interests, on the essential issues in intercollegiate athletics. Even among those with an understanding of athletics, it is viewed as a major institutional concern. Organizations involved in national reform efforts, such as the AAUP, COIA, and NCAA, might consider framing their recommendations accordingly, using athletics as a tool for more general concerns and offering in-depth information about root causes. They might also broaden their audience beyond faculty, perhaps to include campus and athletic administrators. Doing so offers the possibility for alliances at the national level toward broadening shared governance within athletics.

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