

Report to the Faculty Senate on the annual meeting of the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA)

On January 23-24, 2010, the annual meeting of COIA was held on the campus of San Diego State University. In attendance were 52 member representatives and invited speakers. Presentations included a panel discussion on student-athlete welfare. Concerns regarding the clustering of at-risk student athletes into majors that enabled meeting academic performance rating (APR) eligibility criteria were voiced by these and several other presenters. This was especially a concern regarding transfer student athletes. Other student-athlete welfare issues discussed included concerns pertaining to academic dishonesty as athletes are sometimes recruited who do not have sufficient scholastic preparation to succeed in a university environment. This was also reported to result in a “gap” between student-athletes and other students on campuses who enter better prepared to succeed in university-level classes.

John Columbo, a Professor at the University Of Illinois College Of Law, gave a very interesting presentation regarding the use of the US tax system to reform athletics at D1A (FBS) universities across the country. Escalating salaries for coaches at D1A schools was described as an “arms race” problem that should be brought into some resemblance of rational control. One proposal that he made pertained to the conditions on continued tax exemption of donations to university related college athletics. Although most of those present seemed to be interested in his proposals, few seemed to be ready to embrace any course of action that brought the US Internal Revenue Service more deeply into the workings of universities.

Richard Lapchick of the University of Central Florida offered his perspectives on the issue of racial and cultural diversity within intercollegiate athletics. He brought forth numerous statistics regarding the number of head football coaches at D1A schools belonging to a ethnic minority group.

In a review of initial eligibility standards and goals, several issues were brought forward to enhance the probability of academic success by student athletes. One of these was to have a pro-active program to minimize the negative and adverse impact of those athletes receiving special admission during their first year of studies. Similarly, it was suggested that faculty maintain a significant voice in the granting of special admissions to ill-prepared students.

There was also some discussion regarding the message that is being sent to student athletes as they are being recruited. If only members of the athletics department communicate with them during this process, are we sending them the message that academics are valued less than their performance on the field or court? This idea was further extended to the messages that are sent to student athletes while they are in high school (and middle school). Is the importance of academics truly being communicated? If not, why are we then surprised when some student athletes do not seem to value academic coursework?

Gerald Gurney of the University of Oklahoma presented several suggestions for what he described as meaningful faculty contributions to athletic academic reform. These included the maintaining of admission standards with special admissions only in rare and special cases; to require special admissions to be independently reviewed by a faculty-based committee; to develop team limits for high risk student athletes (<30% of any team) and teams with APR penalties not allows special admissions; end academic bonuses for coaches based on APR, GAP or graduation rates; academic support organizational structures to report to an academic unit on campus; and the review of academic majors of student-athletes on a regular basis regarding academic rigor and grade fairness.

A model resolution on intercollegiate athletics was also presented as a discussion piece by individual Faculty Senates. This pertained to the areas of faculty governance, academics, finances, and university advancement.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent this Faculty Senate.

Respectfully submitted,

Gary Rayson