

## **Remarks by Brad Bankston Commissioner of the Old Dominion Athletic Conference**

**January 6, 2007 at the College Sports Project lunch as a part of the NCAA annual convention**

First off – my thanks to Mr. Tobin, Bob and Amy for providing this opportunity to our league members. This luncheon is a great place to continue our focus on integration – and the work we started at our May Institute

I have to admit – it's no secret. As a conference commissioner you look for opportunities for your member institutions – sometimes you hit a homerun other times you do not fair as well. I believe we knocked it out of the park with the ODAC Institute. We were fortunate to have Bob teaching at one of our league members – Guilford College. Bob's experience in Division III and his work with the College Sports Project sent us down the correct path in planning last year's Institute.

We were the first conference to conduct an integration institute conference-wide, encompassing a large group of people from each member school. During the initial discussions, Bob and I both thought big. We met with a group of appointed ADs and decided to model the institute after the one held in St. Louis. We asked Presidents, Direct reports, ADs, SWAs, FARs, male and female coaches to attend from each school. With 13 members – that meant a large group. The essential part of the planning started with the end result. We wanted to emphasize the importance of follow-up – a key ingredient to the institute's success.

We didn't enter this endeavor hoping to see it limit athletic opportunities or discourage excellence. The intent was to encourage our members to attend and begin the process of continued focus on student-athletes being able to maximize the full scope of their collegiate experience.

I don't believe the conference members had reservations about their current practices – they desired a forum for additional communication and information sharing to better their practices of integration on campus. The meeting has paid huge dividends across the league. Various campuses report increased interaction with faculty and improved relations with the academic

side of the university. Many schools have implemented a faculty mentorship program modeled after the Bates College example provided by Suzanne Coffey during her institute presentation.

We continue to stress – at all levels – the importance of maintaining a deliberate course focusing on the importance of a balanced college experience for all student-athletes.

As a conference, we recently completed our first organized Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR) meeting held in conjunction with our annual fall Board meeting. The FARs are engaged in the conference-wide process – a relationship that is vital to our continued focus in this arena. We are planning to host our first athletics direct report meeting in the late spring or summer – making an attempt to provide information sharing and communication among the officers responsible for athletics on their individual campuses.

All-in-all – I am pleased with our initial progress following the Institute. It continues to be at the top of our league agenda. Our presidents are in full support of our continued progress. Follow-up will take place throughout the spring with an official written report submitted to Bob and Amy – identifying challenges schools encountered on campus and suggested solutions and best practices in an attempt to improve the conference as a whole.

Following this morning's commissioners meeting and the talk of an additional membership study, the Division clearly has quite a bit of work ahead of it. As we look towards the future of DIII I know our league members would encourage a direction where the focus and promotion of an ideal integration model is paramount.

Once again – thanks for having me as a part of this function – the ODAC looks forward to its continued work in this area.