

**The Integration of Academic and Athletic Values:
Where Do We Go From Here?**

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Thank you very much Myles. It's a pleasure to be here among so many early risers.

As an historian, I never imagined that I would be talking to a group of college and university presidents about *integration* without referring to the struggle to eliminate racial and residential segregation, the impact of the Brown decision, or the sacrifices of civil rights workers that led to passage of Voting Rights Act. By comparison, the integration of athletics and educational values is a much more mundane form of cultural change. Yet in other ways, the recruitment, admission, and education of student athletes, and the place of athletics within a college and university's central mission touches, sometimes uncomfortably, on themes of segregation, insularity and exclusion.

My goal this morning is to speak across the substantial differences of athletic visibility, commercial and professionalizing pressures, expenditures, scholarships, mission, and scale that differentiate the Association's three divisions. Frankly, I'm not sure whether it's possible to have such a conversation without limiting oneself to banalities, or by introducing some form of simultaneous translation as if we all had earphones on and were participating in a UN General Assembly meeting. Let me begin at the micro level and then broaden the focus to more of a macro analysis.

Three and a half years ago, following publication of Bill Bowen and Sarah Levin's *Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values* (Princeton University Press, 2003), and in response to concerns voiced by a number of Division III presidents about a widening "academic-athletic divide," the Mellon Foundation created the College Sports Project. Two fundamental and interconnected objectives serve as the cornerstones of the CSP: First, athletes are primarily students—their academic outcomes and engagement with a wide variety of campus activities should be *representative* of their peers—and second, students who participate in intercollegiate athletics should do so in an environment that is integrated with and complementary to the educational values of the institution.

In using the concept of *integration*, the CSP intentionally focused attention on the increasingly separate nature of intercollegiate athletics and suggested that the athletic enterprise had become detached and disconnected from colleges and universities' educational missions. Many Division III presidents also agreed that measuring student-athletes' academic performance was an issue that cut across institutional lines and was independent of differences in admission selectivity, endowment size, or athletic success.

Toward that end, the Mellon Foundation made a grant that created a center for data collection and analysis at Northwestern University, and the Center is currently in the process of assisting approximately 120 Division III institutions in measuring several dimensions of their athletes' "representativeness" (including grade point average, class rank, field of study, graduation rate, SAT/ACT score).

The CSP's integration initiative is co-chaired by two consummate professionals—Amy Campbell, the former director of athletics at Bryn Mawr College and currently Special

Assistant to the Vice President for Campus Life at Princeton University, and Bob Malekoff, the former athletics director at Connecticut College and the College of Wooster, and currently an assistant professor of sports studies at Guilford College. Amy and Bob, who are with us this morning, possess a holistic view of intercollegiate athletics' contributions and responsibilities and they are especially wise in recognizing that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to integration. The template for the Integration Institutes that they have designed and implemented for a number of Division III institutions and conferences—with the support of funds from the NCAA—builds on the premise that meaningful integration requires the participation of presidents, academic- and student-affairs professionals, coaches, athletics directors, and faculty members. The CSP's integration institutes are tailored to institutions' and conferences' special needs, and address a broad array of subjects ranging from the hiring, evaluation, contractual status, and professional development of coaches to the importance of broadening institutions' definitions of success in athletics to reflect coaches' roles as teachers and mentors. Amy and Bob would be the first to say that changing institutional culture requires stamina and flexibility but it is not rocket science.

The process of achieving integration—of restoring (or of maintaining) athletics' position as a valued, complementary contributor to higher education's academic and co-curricular life—is not a difficult concept to articulate. But if we take the principle seriously, we have to acknowledge that achieving integration requires a fundamental cultural shift encompassing an institution's definition of athletic success, the criteria used to hire and evaluate coaches, and the recognition among academic faculty and coaches of their shared roles as mentors and teachers.

This is an appropriate point to move our discussion from the micro to the macro level and see if we can identify some common ground. The first collaborative step, I'd suggest, is to acknowledge how much all our institutions have changed in just a generation. Thirty years ago, presidents, provosts, deans, athletic directors, coaches, and faculty members didn't spend much time talking about two-career families, commuting relationships, and the attendant pressures of juggling personal and professional life. Outside of Research-1 institutions, it was a little early to predict more than the trend lines that soon accelerated faculty members' specialization in and loyalty to their academic disciplines over loyalty to their institutions. The shift among some colleges and universities to a greater focus on faculty research and publication, with its commensurate rewards and trade-offs, accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s and one could clearly see how such developments might affect the amount of time faculty would spend with their students and with their colleagues.

A good deal of the ordinary but essential interactions that helped provide the social and intellectual glue that faculty of my generation took for granted is gone. The reality is that with some exceptions, there is much less interaction on all our campuses, especially among faculty members and between faculty and coaches, and we are all paying the price for the degrees of specialization that have fragmented our communities, reduced opportunities for collegial exchange, and weakened "social bonding."¹

Into the vacuum created by faculty members' increased professionalization and institutions' support of that specialization, an almost parallel universe has come into existence. Student affairs professionals began to emerge in sizable numbers about the same time as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (1974) replaced *in loco*

parentis as the primary institutional response to the elimination of parietal rules, which reflected the tumultuous social and cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s.

And while it would be difficult to imagine our institutions operating without the support of this dedicated army of residence hall directors, counselors, health professionals, student activity coordinators, and judicial and administrative deans, recent research continues to indicate that contact with faculty members consistently promotes student persistence, educational aspirations and degree completion. These studies further demonstrate that students' perceptions of faculty members' concerns for their development, as well as faculty availability, have positive and statistically significant effects on persistence.² But the reality on many of our campuses, large and small, is that faculty members' engagement in students' lives is increasingly limited to activity taking place in the classroom or in carefully orchestrated links between academic and residential life, and that student life professionals acting on their own initiative have not been able to fill the vacuum. Today, most athletes, scholarship and non-scholarship alike, spend more time with their coaches than they do with faculty members or with student life professionals combined.

This is one reason why the responsibility for educating and socializing student athletes has moved away from the faculty and student affairs personnel to the athletic department. As we are all aware, coaches have more and deeper interactions with athletes than many faculty members or others have with students, and higher education has much to learn from coaches and athletics administrators about engaging and eliciting the best efforts of students. Few on campus affect students' lives as directly or as profoundly as do coaches, and fewer still have the potential to focus their energies so directly on

students' needs and developments. Given the mutually supportive roles that coaches and faculty should play, the divide that has grown up between athletics and the campus has created a world of missed opportunities on both sides.

One immediate challenge facing all of us is finding ways to strengthen the ties and mutual respect that should exist among coaches, academic and student life administrators, and the faculties of our institutions, particularly by helping faculty members understand the educational value and institutional benefits of athletics.

For a variety of reasons—some within the control of colleges and universities, some not—athletes at all levels of competition tend to have demanding schedules and increasingly segregated experiences. The idea of integrating athletes into the mainstream of an institution's educational life sounds good in theory but runs head-first into the reality of 20 hours of practice a week and at most Division IA institutions, this is a year-round endeavor.

Elite athletes in high-visibility sports find it difficult to participate in campus life. Athletes' lives are circumscribed, not only by the demands of competition, and especially practice and training—in and out of season—but just as much by their visibility, name recognition, and constant media attention. In recent years, many of the strictures limiting participation in student life have extended to lower profile sports. Quite simply, the demands of competing, and training over the entire academic year, conflict with the day-to-day life of participation in campus activities.

The issue is not the total number of hours devoted to the sport, but rather the insularity of the culture in which athletes live, the height of the bar that colleges and universities set with respect to educational expectations, and student athletes' actual

academic aspirations and outcomes. One might expect to find the same kind of immersion and withdrawal, with similar patterns of academic underperformance, among students whose lives revolve around the performing arts, the school newspaper or student government. But research indicates that students in such fields do not underperform academically; in fact, students who devote substantial time to such extracurricular activities exhibit a modest degree of “over-performance.”³

It may be that at the Division IA level that high visibility, high revenue-producing sports like football and basketball are beyond the strategies that seem to be working in the non-scholarship, non-revenue producing world of Division III. Even if that were true, this does not mean that interested presidents, including those leading institutions with high profile athletic programs, cannot signal their faculties, athletics directors and student life professionals that they are interested in identifying best practices that would lead incrementally to more meaningful integration.

There are two threshold questions, the answers to which may help us bridge the gap currently separating the NCAA’s three divisions: First, what is the responsibility of student athletes, coaches, and athletics directors to be part of the broader campus community? Second, what are the normative obligations that colleges and universities have to student-athletes to add value to their experience?

All institutions expect coaches to care about their players’ academic performance and off-the-field behavior. Increasingly, however, we have delegated to coaches and athletic departments the ethical and integrity functions that faculty members and student life professionals offer other students, without providing them with the professional support, training, or shared responsibility to meet athletes’ needs, and with little self-

reflection of how athletic competition fits into our institutions' educational missions. And, in some cases, when academic support structures are created that are limited to student athletes, universities compound this sense of isolation and entitlement, add unnecessary institutional costs by duplicating services, and miss an opportunity to truly integrate athletes into the campus mainstream.

As a consequence, the focus shifts away from helping students test their individual and intellectual growth to more practical benchmarks like ensuring minimum entrance and performance standards—especially maintaining eligibility and graduation rates. In a sense, we are holding athletic departments to a higher standard in terms of expecting them to meet athletes' multiple needs but allowing them to set the bar fairly low in terms of academic performance. How many coaches approach the beginning of their competitive seasons by exhorting their teams to strive for a .500 record; yet, for some reason, we are quite willing to openly celebrate the most minimal level of academic achievement for student athletes. Aren't we depriving some of our students by setting the bar so low? In each case, with the best of intentions, we're doing these things with little appreciation of the cost to the campus culture or to the individual student-athlete who is left barely, if at all prepared, for a life beyond athletics and college.

How can we create an environment where faculty and coaches—the two groups who share a deep mutual respect and responsibility for students, who are arguably the most influential teachers, mentors and advisors on campus—can find ways to bridge the chasms that threaten to turn our institutions into balkanized enclaves of competing interests?

As always, the common element behind any movement for change is likely to be a combination of presidential leadership and influence—on-campus with respect to engaging a representative cross-section of faculty, coaches, academic, student life and athletic administrators, at the conference level, and within the NCAA. I am mindful of the fact that you have limited time and limited political capital to expend, and that athletics is a cultural fault line with real vulnerabilities and enormous risks, and that presidents can not do it alone. Many of us believe there is a role to be played by third party organizations, particularly national foundations that have the privilege of “seeing the whole field,” and whose interactions with colleges and universities on a number of mission-driven educational objectives provide an external confirmation of the importance of integration.

About a month ago, the officers and staff of the Mellon Foundation and the College Sports Project and the Knight Foundation’s Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics invited Myles Brand and a small group of presidents from across the NCAA’s three divisions to a wide-ranging discussion about athletics and the academic environment that also touched on issues of commercialism, the cost of athletic programs, the pressure from boosters and alumni, the influence of youth sports and the professional ranks, and the role and limits of presidential leadership.

If those of us here this morning represent the disparate views of the UN General Assembly, then the Knight-Mellon meeting might best described as a gathering of the Security Council. No one took off a shoe and pounded it against the table but in the language of diplomacy, we had a “frank and constructive” exchange of views, and by day’s end we had found a common language and sense of urgency, if not necessarily a

consensus around common solutions. But this is still a work in progress and we will persevere.

I began this talk with a brief reference to the Civil Rights movement and it seems appropriate to conclude on a parallel note. One of the constant tensions in devising a successful consensus strategy for achieving racial integration was finding a way to balance the competing demands for “direct action” versus those who argued for a more gradual, legalistic, and legislative approach. I think that we face a similar challenge in thinking about the integration of college sports and educational values.

The current interest in the cultural questions that fall under the broad umbrella of athletic and academic integration suggests that we are facing a problem that does not discriminate among divisions and is a growing concern for all higher education institutions with athletic programs, from the smallest private college to the largest flagship university

Whatever momentum may result from current and future efforts to integrate athletics into the mainstream of colleges and universities’ educational missions will most likely begin at home and only if presidents feel strongly enough to exert their influence in encouraging cross-campus collaboration. This is an instance when real cultural change, if any is to come, will begin with a change in attitude. I don’t think it would be useful to try to enforce appropriate behavior through legislation.

Finally, integration will succeed or fail to the degree that the values its advocates espouse are embraced by individual institutions who tailor their initiatives to meet institutional, conference-level, and down the road, possibly division-wide needs. I also

believe that integration may be one of those rare home-grown movements whose best practices trickle up, down and across the NCAA.

ENDNOTES

¹ This discussion draws heavily on the insight and recommendations found in Stephen R. Lewis, Jr., “Rethinking Athletics and the Academy,” June 22, 2005, Keynote Address, College Sports Project Pilot Institute on Integration, Washington University in St. Louis, see <http://www.collegesportsproject.org>, accessed December 20, 2006.

² Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How Colleges Affects Students, volume 2, A Third Decade of Research* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass), pp. 417-418.

³ See James L. Shulman and William G. Bowen, *The Game of Life: College Sports and Educational Values* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 69-70 and William G. Bowen and Sarah A. Levin, *Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 228-232, 145-169.