

Integration and Communicaton
Robert Malekoff
Assistant Professor of Sports Studies, Guilford College

I'd like to thank everyone in attendance today for taking time out of your busy schedules to participate in this inaugural institute, and for your continuing commitment to strengthening the educational value of college athletic programs both at your own institutions and nationwide.

What do we mean by the term integration? As it applies to college sports, integration might be best defined as a deliberate effort to encourage the academic, athletic, and student life dimensions of colleges and universities to work jointly in attempting to align athletic programs with educational missions. This integration into the life of the academy must be embraced as a two-way street. While faculty, academic administrators, and student life staff will ideally strive to understand and support the important and many times positive role that athletics can play on Division III campuses, members of the athletic department in particular must work to ensure that the climate surrounding all intercollegiate activities contribute to the development of a culture that is consistent with the institution's stated goals and priorities. Clearly, the ability of all involved parties to communicate and work together effectively is of paramount importance.

Before we further discuss the concept of integration and how it might play out on your respective campuses, a disclaimer of sorts may be in order. Just as Division III as a whole is an extraordinarily diverse and loosely coupled grouping, the ten schools represented here this morning all have their own unique set of missions, goals, and challenges. It would be presumptuous of anyone to arbitrarily propose some laundry list of recommendations intended to build bridges and strengthen the bonds between the athletic department and the academic and student life dimensions on your campuses. Those of you who have played active roles in related efforts – and as I look around the room, there are many of you - know that no silver bullet that will lead to the ongoing integration we seek exists. So, I'd like to spend the time allotted me this morning to: (1) identify and expand upon the various challenges and obstacles that we face in our efforts to fully integrate our athletic programs into the life of the college; and (2) to offer a set of both general and specific recommendations that are intended to stimulate discussion in the ensuing breakout session. Most importantly, I hope that our information sharing might lead to the development of a deliberate and purposeful commitment – or, as the case may be recommitment - to integration discussions and activities on your own campuses.

During the past five years those of us involved in Division III athletics have thought long and hard about how best to conduct our athletic programs. Deliberations surrounding the 2004 NCAA Convention reform vote and the ongoing Future of Division III initiative have included the kinds of comprehensive and thoughtful discussions that – in the end – would likely benefit any organization. Not surprisingly, the range of opinions about how to proceed culled through various surveys and literally hundreds of

discussions and focus group sessions have been as diverse as the membership itself. A not insignificant number of our colleagues have expressed concern about the direction of Division III athletics, sensing that we are headed down the road of a more professionalized model that flies in the face of our philosophical tenets. On the other hand, there are those – and by those I don't only refer to athletic administrators and coaches - who have indicated a degree of doubt regarding the alleged challenges we face. Indeed, at the 2004 convention some of the more passionate protests of various reform proposals came from members of FARA, the Faculty Athletics Representatives Association. Those who favor the status quo, or even a model that might place greater emphasis on athletics, often raise two questions for our consideration: (1) We don't have any significant problems in Division III, so why doesn't the NCAA leave us alone and concentrate on fixing Division I where the real problems lie; and (2) are these alleged concerns threatening enough to demand our considerable attention and limited available time? It may be helpful to take a few moments to address these two queries, and I'll start with the latter.

The significant impact of co- and extracurricular activities on campus culture is undeniable, and this may be particularly the case when it comes to intercollegiate athletics and colleges with relatively small enrollments...precisely the kinds of schools we typically find in Division III. Indeed there is evidence that athletics has a far greater impact on the composition of the student body and arguably the campus ethos at most Division III schools than at the great majority of Division I universities. Our friends from Allegheny can tell us that the North Coast Athletic Conference consists of ten institutions with an average undergraduate enrollment of 1,700. With almost 400 intercollegiate participants per school, slightly more than 1 in every 5 NCAC students plays on a college sports team. This NCAC participation rate is only slightly higher than the Division III national average of 19 percent, and it is important to note that this excludes the number of students who were varsity athletes at some point during their college years but chose to discontinue their participation. Some athletic directors estimate that close to 40 percent of their students have been members of an athletic team at some point during their college years.

So, how important is athletics in the lives of Division III participants? While students typically spend between 12-18 hours per week in traditional classroom settings, how they choose to spend the remaining 100+ hours has an increasingly dramatic impact on the undergraduate experience. In Harvard Graduate School of Education professor Richard Light's extensive study of how students might make the most of college, he concludes that learning outside of the classroom, especially in residential settings and extracurricular activities is vital. When Light asked students to identify a seminal incident or moment that had changed them profoundly, 80 percent cited a situation or event that had occurred outside of the classroom. Those students went on to emphasize the importance of relationships they had developed with various mentors...whether they be professors, resident advisors, counselors, or – yes – coaches and other members of the athletic department. Factor in the significant investments of student time, facilities, and various human resource components associated with college athletic programs, and one can only conclude that we are missing the boat if we don't take the time to think long and

hard about how Division III college sports might best interact with our most ambitious educational goals.

But what about this alleged existence of a Division III sports ‘problem?’ After all, don’t many observers wonder why all college sports can’t be more like they are in Division III, where athletes are invariably representative of the student body as a whole and sports programs and the pursuit of championships are always secondary to academic pursuits? Even college sports’ arguably most notorious critic – retired Indiana University professor and Bobby Knight antagonist Murray Sperber - claims that while ‘in Division I the athletic department’s priority is to produce winning teams, while the Division III priority is to allow athletes to develop as students.’ But the fact that our challenges may be more subtle or less publicized than those more commonly found at what some refer to as “big-time” schools doesn’t mean that we are immune from some of the problems that many times go hand in hand with highly charged sports competition.

I won’t argue with Sperber about the potential educational utility of athletic participation, and there can be no doubt that literally thousands of undergraduates benefit annually from the opportunity to participate on Division III teams. Former Yale University president and Major League Baseball commissioner the late A. Bartlett Giamatti argued that athletics “teaches lessons valuable to the individual by stretching the human spirit in ways that nothing else can.” But while Giamatti encouraged colleges and universities to support sport as an essential aspect of the educational process, he also cautioned that athletics and the unchecked pursuit of championships should not take precedence over the more general participatory value of sport within the context of the academy.

Before we consider a variety of integration initiatives and prescriptive steps, we may want to identify more precisely what kinds of challenges we are talking about. Some have claimed that the primary issues raised over the past five years and most often associated with Division III schools in general are really ‘elite’ school issues, having to do with admissions policies that apply only to the most academically selective institutions. However, from qualitative studies, survey results, and literally hundreds of interviews with Division III presidents, faculty, athletic administrators, coaches, and student-athletes, five prominent themes emerge regarding a potentially growing disconnect between college athletics and educational goals.

First, the amount of time Division III athletes spend on their sports – and therefore away from other pursuits, both academic and otherwise – has increased dramatically. For example, the non-traditional season – once an opportunity for team members to play and train informally – has become an increasingly intense practice period. In addition, a not insignificant number of athletes indicated that they spent over 30 hours per week on sports related activities during the competitive season.

Second, there is increased pressure on Division III coaches to demonstrate competitive success and to lead their teams to NCAA championship play. While once these pressures were typically reserved for coaches of – not my term - ‘high profile’

sports such as football and men's basketball, today coaches of all sports – including those that are typically less publicized - are subject to assessment that places a greater premium on winning. Out of necessity Division III coaches spend far more time recruiting today than in the past, and the model of faculty/coach – a coach that teaches, is involved in coaching more than one sport, and serves a variety of student mentoring roles – is found at far fewer schools. It is important to note that coaches should not necessarily be assigned any sort of blame for these developments, nor is it likely that they have any less of a desire to educate and serve students than did their predecessors. The contemporary coach is simply reacting to the increasing demands of the profession and what some might term the new and ever evolving rules of the game.

Third, the pursuit of national championships has taken on added, and in some cases all consuming significance. While the competitive emphasis in Division III was once geared to geographically close, traditional rivalries and the pursuit of conference championships, today an increasing number of participants and what I'll term 'interested observers' view conference competition as little more than a means to an invitation to the NCAA tournament. Once a team has tasted the fruits of success at the national level, anything less may become untenable. This emphasis often manifests itself in the athlete being asked to spend more time and energy on his/her sport.

Fourth, virtually all parties point to the increasing intensity and specialization of sports from the youth through high school levels. Students who participate on high school teams are cautioned by their coaches and assorted advisors that if they hope to earn an athletic scholarship or to gain an edge in the admissions process, they must focus on one sport year round. Perhaps understandably, students – and often their parents – who have come up through a system that values specialization and year round commitment to one sport arrive at college with the expectation that this level of engagement will continue...or may even increase. Of course, it should be noted that we could find examples of specialization in many other aspects of college life, as well, certainly in the academic arena.

And finally, we are reminded time and again of the keep up with the Jones' mentality that permeates competitive athletics at all levels. When a member of a conference chooses to pursue athletic excellence through increased time commitment and resource allocation, what choice do other conference schools have but to follow down a similar expansive path? There may be few better examples of the workings of the domino theory than competitive college athletics.

So, how might we best proceed and why might the concept of integration hold particular promise? The answer to these questions might in some part be found by considering what types of thinking and initiatives will not serve to bring about the educational model we all seek.

It would certainly be a mistake to think we can simply turn back the clock to some perceived golden age of intercollegiate athletics, and truth be told the alignment of college sports with educational values has been somewhat elusive since the first recorded intercollegiate athletic contest over 150 years ago. It would be equally futile to try to

mandate change, even to the ten institutions here today much less to a group as large and diverse as the 430 schools in Division III. What about the legislative process? While rules and regulations that support a healthy balance between athletics, academics, and student life activities serve as an important and necessary foundation, history teaches us that legislation alone will not assure the level of balance that might most benefit our students. Finally, we must acknowledge that many students and coaches understandably seek more rather than fewer participatory opportunities, and quite appropriately strive to perform at the very highest level. In his essay ‘Intercollegiate Athletics in America: Two Compelling, Competing Logics of Excellence,’ Georgetown University President Jack DeGoia argues that at the core of many of the challenges we face in intercollegiate sports is a conflict between two primary and competing frameworks that both constitute human excellence. One framework is best represented as a balance among the various dimensions of the college experience, while the other is rooted in the single-minded pursuit of boundary breaking achievement. Perhaps this conflict constitutes integration at its most fundamental level. While our institutions promote and endeavor to nurture a broad-based undergraduate experience, coaches and faculty alike are focused in the pursuit of excellence within their own fields. So, as we begin to think more specifically about how we might achieve integration, perhaps two essential questions can serve as our guide: (1) how might we all work together to best develop and foster a healthy balance between the pursuit of excellence in both academics, athletics, and other extracurricular areas; and (2) what general and more specific actions might we consider in an effort to bring about and ultimately institutionalize the level of integration that we seek?

One increasingly popular and effective integration initiative has its roots at Princeton University, where the Academic Athletic Fellows Program has brought faculty, coaches, and student-athletes together in a variety of ways. For many years at Princeton, Marvin Bressler – a longtime sociology professor – served as an informal advisor to the men’s basketball team. The positive influence – both academic and otherwise - that Bressler had on numerous students over the years was so profound that current Princeton athletic director Gary Walters attempted to replicate it with all Princeton teams through a formalized mentoring program. A faculty mentor is assigned to each sport with three primary goals in mind: (1) offering student-athletes a central reference point from which to identify various institutional resources; (2) for all parties to recognize the value of athletics as a valuable part of an undergraduate education; and (3) to provide faculty role models for students who participate on athletic teams. Wesleyan University sponsors a similar program – Faculty Team Mentors – where both faculty and staff work closely with assigned teams. The mentors meet twice a year to share practices that hold particular promise, and also meet with students to develop agendas and discuss issues related to student-athlete welfare. Wesleyan athletic director John Biddiscombe – who we’ll hear from later this morning – claims that some of the most worthwhile outcomes of the program come in the form of unanticipated benefits. John emphasizes that the Wesleyan program has helped students, coaches and team mentors gain greater insight into the others challenges and perspectives.

It is said that you only get one chance to make a first impression, and I would urge us all to think carefully about what integration efforts might interact with various

campus orientation activities. Ten years ago in the summer immediately prior to my first year as the Director of Athletics at The College of Wooster I was having lunch in the student center when I overheard a senior professor speaking to a new faculty member about his concern that the football team had a particularly large – that is, large in number – incoming class. The professor went on to disparage college athletics in a variety of ways. Being new to the College myself I had been invited to participate in a fairly extensive faculty orientation program, and I asked the Vice President for Academic Affairs whether or not the topic of intercollegiate athletics was on the agenda. It was not, and we agreed that a one-hour slot would be reserved for me to speak to new faculty about the role of athletics at Wooster, something I did each year throughout my tenure. More times than not a fair amount of discussion at these sessions was spent dispelling various myths. These preconceived notions about Division III athletics come from three primary sources: (1) the previously mentioned influence of some senior faculty; (2) the lumping of what one reads in newspapers and sees on television about Division I into a single vision of all college sports; and (3) the related assumption on the part of new faculty that the sportsworld they are familiar with from the major university where they attended graduate school is representative of what goes on in Division III. In addition to offering an opportunity to dispel these myths, the sessions provided a forum to talk about the various educational benefits of Division III athletics, the broad based nature of our non-intercollegiate offerings, and – just as we pledged to honor the primacy of the academic program – we urged these new colleagues to support students in their efforts to excel both academically *and* athletically.

Ultimately, we may want to think more broadly about the interaction of integration goals and orientation opportunities. Similar sessions with student life personnel and particularly with resident advisors who from time to time find themselves in the middle of delicate behavioral incidents may be helpful. It may be advisable to think carefully about how our student-athletes are introduced to the athletic program, particularly the case for fall sport athletes whose initial experience as a college student is the athletic preseason. Having an academic administrator, faculty member, or student life representative address each team at their organizational or eligibility meeting could be beneficial.

But, of course, efforts to bring about greater integration must be ongoing, and the creation of a climate that encourages and supports routine communication is vital. What kinds of communication opportunities are we talking about? While we are all aware that on a college campus people's time is a valuable commodity, at the most elementary level athletes, coaches and athletic administrators should be encouraged to attend and when appropriate be active participants in a wide variety of college meetings and activities. But likewise, faculty and student life personnel should endeavor to demonstrate their support for students and members of the athletic department by trying to attend at least some sports contests and participating in other activities and programs associated with the athletic department. At some schools members of the faculty are periodically invited to attend athletic department meetings so that they might learn more about the inner workings of the department, or to speak about their disciplines so that coaches might become more knowledgeable about particular areas of study. At others, members of the

athletic department from time to time attend academic department meetings to talk about issues related to academic performance by athletes and NCAA and conference issues that could impact student-athlete time commitments. A group of Wooster faculty sponsored monthly brown bag lunch meetings to discuss various teaching techniques, and members of the athletic department were invited to participate, and to give presentations on how they conducted practices and prepared teams for competition. For those schools that offer theory courses or a Physical Education curriculum, there are a wealth of opportunities to have faculty serve as guest lecturers, or even for faculty and coaches to collaborate from an interdisciplinary standpoint. The development of a Sport in Society course at Wooster was the result of a collaborative effort on the part of faculty from the Departments of Economics, Sociology, Psychology and an assortment of coaches.

Arguably one of the best opportunities for communication and integration between faculty, student life staff, and members of the athletic department is through participation on search committees. Given reasonable fiscal stability, nothing is more important to the strength of an educational institution than selecting, attracting, and retaining good people. Not only does the inclusion of faculty and student life representatives potentially add to the effectiveness of a search committee, but it also sends a clear signal to candidates about institutional priorities. Participation on search committees brings people together who have previously had little interaction, and often offer colleagues from different areas of the college an opportunity to view each other in a new light. At Wooster, we saw it as a win-win situation when athletic department representatives served on search committees for positions such as Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of Students, Dean of Admission, etc.

While the initiatives I've suggested less far are more specific in nature, I'd like to spend the time we have remaining by offering a few axioms that may be helpful as you think about how you might introduce and strengthen integration efforts on your own campus. The first has to do with how faculty and members of the athletic department interact.

Relations between faculty and coaches are many times delicate, and in some unfortunate instances, strained. Some observers believe that faculty can often be grouped into one of three camps insofar as their view of the utility of sport in higher education. A small number of faculty on each campus are highly supportive of the intercollegiate athletic program, and recognize and value the role that competitive sport plays in the educational process. These colleagues are mainstays at athletic contests, take the time to regularly interact with coaches, and make students who participate on athletic teams feel as if they are valued contributors to the life of the college or university. On the other end of the spectrum are – again – a relatively small number of faculty who view intercollegiate sports as problematic...even harmful. They may be particularly outspoken at faculty meetings in assigning all sorts of blame to the existence of the athletic program. These naysayers tend to think of athletes in more stereotypical terms, for example assuming that there is a correlation between members of certain teams and a less than acceptable commitment to academic pursuits. There is likely very little any of us can do to convince the skeptics among us of the potential educational utility of athletics. The

great majority of faculty – and I'll refer to them as the middlings - fall somewhere in between these two extremes and typically receive less attention than do their colleagues who are either particularly pro- or anti-athletics. We naturally and very happily interact with those who support our programs, and we feel as if we have to address the various accusations that are often made by faculty who view athletics as – at best – a necessary evil. We are well advised to think more carefully about how we might seek to interact with this more malleable middling group, and to expose such a critical mass of colleagues to the many positive aspects of our programs.

The second axiom is best labeled, 'pick your battles wisely.' Faculty, coaches, and student life staff all take their work very seriously. The coach is concerned that his players won't be adequately prepared to compete if they miss a practice or team meeting. Likewise, the professor worries that a student absent from class will be undermined by not fully participating in a carefully sequenced set of lesson plans. Student life personnel understandably want undergraduates to be fully engaged in the residential and extracurricular life of the college. Like successful professionals in other fields, those of us who work in higher education tend to both benefit and be compromised by a tunnel visioned approach to our jobs. In the best of cases this single-minded focus may lead to the kinds of achievements we can celebrate. In a worst case scenario, such a myopic perspective has a segregating effect. In order to achieve the level of integration we seek, there needs to be recognition and sensitivity to what I'll call non-negotiable activities, and this requires walking a mile in the other guy's shoes. For example, first year student orientation week almost always comes at a time when fall sports teams are preparing for the start of their competitive seasons. Given the short preseason period, coaches are understandably anxious to take full advantage of the preparation time they have prior to the first scheduled contest. That said, most orientation programs include at least some activities that are considered to be particularly sacrosanct. At Wooster, the Thursday of Orientation Week included a variety of academic placement tests that took place throughout the morning and early afternoon, and academic department open houses later in the day. The open houses offered students an opportunity to meet individually with faculty to discuss potential courses of study before registering for their fall semester classes. So perhaps not surprisingly, every year the Thursday afternoon of orientation week proved to be a particular source of conflict between some coaches and faculty. For a whole variety of reasons I would suggest that coaches should recognize this as one of those non-negotiable situations, and lobbying for practice time that might conflict with these activities will do far more harm than good. It's simply not a battle worth fighting. And the point is not to have a faculty mandated 'no practice' policy, but rather for there to be an appreciation for the broader purposes of the orientation program. But as I urged earlier, integration must work both ways. So for example, when a student in good standing seeks permission to miss a class in order to participate in a postseason conference tournament competition, I would hope that every consideration would be tendered, and that faculty would view this as a worthwhile educational opportunity.

In closing, I'd like to suggest two ways in which you might try to think about and frame your school's own integration efforts.

In the many thought provoking conversations I've had with Dan Dutcher over the past several years he has often urged that we in Division III would benefit by thinking very deliberately about how we might distinguish ourselves from other models in ways that transcend the most often cited contrast, the awarding of athletically based financial aid. Whether or not there is anything about the Division I and II systems that are inherently flawed is not the point. However, while sports excellence at athletic scholarship granting institutions is more often defined in terms winning championships and - in many cases - entertainment value and associated revenue production, our stated mission is very sharply focused on the kinds of educational experiences we can provide to students. The honorable pursuit of victory is a very good thing and as long as we are keeping score we will, of course, strive for competitive success. But Dan's suggestion reminds me of our friend Bill Troutt's proposal that perhaps we need to think more in terms of a new scorecard...one that still counts wins and losses but also creates a broader paradigm of excellence by more purposely recognizing the types of achievements that are at the core of Division III conference and institutional mission statements.

Finally, Centre College president John Roush – speaking from the perspective of a former Academic All-American football player - stresses that in order for athletics to have a chance to be truly integrated into the life of a college all parties must think of the effort in very intentional terms, and that this must mirror how we approach other important challenges on our campuses. I can think of few activities that are more intentionally conceived than preparation for an athletic contest. Coaches scrupulously scout their opponents to determine both individual and team tendencies and prepare practice segments and game plans accordingly. All of the planning is designed to put a team in the best position to achieve victory. Likewise, other campus partners pursue various goals in similarly deliberate ways. The department chair thinking about curriculum development, the Dean of Admissions trying to determine the best way to recruit the next class, the Dean of Students thinking about the orientation schematic...all done in a very deliberate manner. But are we – and when I say we I again don't refer exclusively to those who work the athletic side of the street - equally as deliberate when it comes to how we endeavor to ensure that our athletic programs might best complement educational missions? In at least some cases it seems as if we approach integration in something of a reactionary mode...as the result of some perceived athletically related academic or behavioral crisis, and I would argue that we will be better served by striving to proceed in a more positive, proactive manner.

As we all know, athletic and academic excellence need not have to be mutually exclusive. None of the activities we've discussed this morning conflict with our efforts to field successful athletic teams or to have our sports programs align with educational missions. Indeed, there is little doubt that the truly integrated athletic program will enhance the educational experience of our students.

Thank you for your attendance here in St. Louis and for your attention this morning, and I look forward too many fruitful discussions – both formal and otherwise – throughout the rest of the day and in the months ahead.