



The Role of the Faculty in the Governance of College Athletics

The report which follows was prepared by the Special Committee on Athletics, established by the Executive Committee of the Council of the American Association of University Professors. It was approved for publication by the Association's Committee on College and University Government in December 1989.

College athletics in this country is in continuing crisis. Even after several years of proposals and discussions of reform, the gains achieved are quite modest. Earlier inquiries revealed significant educational neglect in major college basketball and football programs, with shockingly low graduation rates at some institutions. Among the dismal revelations were findings that fewer than one in ten basketball players graduated at a large research university in the Midwest, and that no black basketball players graduated in a ten-year period at a southern regional state university. Graduation rates of less than 30 percent were common. Admissions standards often seemed guided solely by athletic concerns. A more recent study revealed that thirty-five of ninety-seven major basketball programs had graduation rates of 0 to 20 percent. These results occurred despite the existence of extensive tutoring efforts. In addition, the integrity of universities was repeatedly compromised when boosters and alumni—and not infrequently members of the institution's staff—improperly paid money to athletes.

Despite the attention given to intercollegiate sports reform in the media and elsewhere, ample evidence exists that the problems in college sports are persistent, substantial, and fundamental. It continues to be true in most major programs that basketball and football players are among the worst students on campus. It is not unusual to find that the median SAT scores for basketball and football players are hundreds of points below those for the general student body. Moreover, while improper payments to athletes appear to have abated from the frenzied level of a few years ago, the practice has not disappeared, as recent investigations have revealed.

It is not surprising that the crisis in intercollegiate sports continues. The fact of the matter is that the economic environment that produced academic and financial improprieties in the past has not substantially changed. The teams that win the most continue to earn the most in college sports. Adherence to rigorous admissions and academic standards is an impediment to winning, and a college that seeks to provide its athletes with a serious academic endeavor runs the risk that its competitors will not. The commercial rewards of athletic success continue to be juxtaposed to rigorous academic pursuits.

The time has come to recognize that intercollegiate athletics poses a major governance problem for American colleges and universities. Athletics is no longer merely an interesting extracurricular activity that occupies the campus on Saturday afternoon. 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. Moreover, policy making in athletics is greatly affected by decisions that are made far from campus. These include decisions made by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), by competing institutions, and by the broadcasting companies that are providing the revenues that have financed the recent expansion of college sports.

Recent experience has shown that the athletic department should not be allowed to function as a separate entity. Such an arrangement ignores the important implications that athletics has for the college's educational program, including the potential for skewing the allocation of institutional resources and impeding the educational development of athletes. Despite the substantial amounts of money earned in athletics at some colleges and universities, almost none of it is used to support academic programs. Indeed, academic programs are often threatened, but seldom benefited, by changes in the fortunes of the athletic program. The impulse toward separateness of the athletic department needs to be curbed. The goal of structural reform in the governance of college sports should be more fully to integrate athletics into the educational mission of the institution.

The policy statement that follows addresses the general allocation of authority in the governance of athletics. This statement is undertaken with a realistic view of the prospects for college sports reform. It is doubtful that faculty efforts alone will be sufficient to refocus the priorities of major athletic programs. On the other hand, faculties are in a unique position to advocate adherence to meaningful academic standards. Faculties, able to speak with independence and candor, can add important balance to the discussion of reform.

The statement emphasizes the obligation of the faculty to ensure academic primacy in an institution's athletic program. An essential message is that the faculty has primary responsibility for ensuring the educational integrity of the student's academic experience. In addition, the faculty has a vital role to play in assessing the educational and budgetary implications of decisions concerning the scope of the athletic program. This statement addresses how responsibility for policy making on athletics should be allocated between the faculty and other components of the university.

General Principles

The basic framework for defining faculty responsibility in the governance of athletics is found in an earlier statement of Association policy. The 1966 *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities* underscores the need for joint participation in governance by the various constituencies within the university:

The variety and complexity of the tasks performed by institutions of higher education produce an inescapable interdependence among governing board, administration, faculty, students, and others. The relationship calls for adequate communication among these components, and full opportunity for appropriate joint planning and effort.

The *Statement on Government* recognizes that the faculty has primary responsibility with respect to fundamental areas of educational policy, and that the faculty, along with other components of the institution, should participate in the exchange of information that accompanies long-range planning.

The AAUP's derivative 1972 *Statement on the Role of the Faculty in Budgetary and Salary Matters* elaborates on the faculty's participation in a university's internal budgetary process. An important premise of that statement is that budgetary matters are an appropriate faculty concern:

The faculty should participate both in the preparation of the total institutional budget and (within the framework of the total budget) in decisions relevant to the further apportioning of its specific fiscal divisions. . . .

Both statements provide that the authority for final decision making is to be allocated among the governing board, the president, and the faculty consistent with the responsibility that each component appropriately claims within the overall governance structure. Even where primary responsibility rests with one component, the other affected parties may have a legitimate participatory role.

1. The Importance of Full Disclosure of Information About the Athletic Program

In the past, the governance of athletics has been made more difficult because administrators and others have treated information about the athletic program as highly secret. Often, information critical of admissions policies, the educational experience of athletes, and financial arrangements with coaches and booster clubs is revealed only as a result of scrutiny by outside agencies, such as the press or the NCAA. Such secretiveness is unacceptable in an intellectual environment that is committed to fostering open and candid discussion. It is also antithetical to effective governance.

For the future, the presumption must be that all aspects of the operation of the athletic department, including the education of athletes and the finances of booster clubs, are open to scrutiny by the university community. A special effort should be made to ensure the confidentiality of information where that is needed to protect the privacy of individual athletes and employees. In general, however, policies with respect to athletics should be subject to the same openness of debate that attends other financial and educational issues within the academic community.

2. The Primacy of Faculty Responsibility for the Athlete's Educational Experience

The faculty has primary responsibility for those aspects of an athlete's experience that involve education. Thus, it is the faculty's duty to ensure that the athlete has a full opportunity to participate in the educational process and that a proper balance is achieved between the athletic and educational experiences. Especially in the present era of intensive, highly commercialized college sports, there are often pressures within the athletic program that draw athletes away from the type of preparation, review, and class attendance that are fundamental to a meaningful education. The faculty has the primary obligation to ensure that pressures are tempered and that athletes have adequate opportunity to pursue educational goals. Review of faculty decisions in this area may be allocated to other governing components, but that review is to be exercised with appropriate regard for the primacy of the faculty's role.

3. The Faculty's Role in Policy Making in Other Aspects of the Athletic Program

Other issues involving athletic policy have substantial administrative components and thus come within the range of authority of other units of the university. Almost all of these, however, may have important educational implications and thus are legitimately of concern to

the faculty. Among the matters warranting attention are questions such as the level of competition at which the university will participate and more specific questions concerning the length of playing seasons and policies with respect to team travel. A decision to move to a higher level of competition, for example, will often mean that athletes face increased pressures on their academic schedules. In the same vein, long playing seasons may present a significant barrier to regular class attendance. Because of their mixed educational and administrative character, such issues of athletic policy will call for joint participation by faculty, administration, and, where appropriate, other components of the university.

In addition to its particular concerns about the impact of athletics on educational programs, the faculty has a shared interest in planning for the long-range development of the university. The faculty should also play an appropriate role in decisions about the allocation of resources within the university. Policy making with respect to athletics affects both of these governance functions and thus the faculty is properly involved.

Faculty involvement is particularly important with respect to the budgetary deliberations undertaken in connection with the athletic program, even with the understanding that ultimate budgetary authority may reside in another body. The allocation of money to and within the athletic program can be a direct determinant of the level of competition that is pursued and hence greatly influences the degree of nonacademic pressure that participants experience. In addition, athletics increasingly involves major decisions on allocation of resources that should properly be viewed in the context of more general institutional needs and goals. A mechanism should exist for meaningful faculty participation in the budgetary decisions that determine the overall size and scope of the athletic program.

4. The Institution's Relationship with Outside Regulatory Bodies

Outside regulatory bodies, such as the NCAA and athletic conferences, play an important role in establishing policies that affect the internal functioning of a university's athletic programs. An individual institution's limited influence over such external entities requires special attention in the institution's internal governance structure. The coordination and execution of a university's participation is properly a function of the president or chancellor. On the other hand, the legislative deliberations of the outside body will frequently affect areas over which the faculty has primary internal responsibility.

Each institution should develop mechanisms that recognize the role of the chief executive officer in speaking for the institution, but which also afford an opportunity for faculty participation in the formulation of the institution's response. Consistent with the principles set forth above, responsibility in this area will typically be shared with other components of the university, with the weight given to the faculty's voice dependent on the particular issues and the degree of the faculty's responsibility in the area of concern.

The Mechanisms for Faculty Participation

1. Oversight of the Educational Experiences of Athletes

The importance of the faculty's role in defining and monitoring the educational experiences of athletes cannot be overstated. A candid appraisal of major intercollegiate athletic programs will reveal that the internal incentives for educational achievement are modest at best. Refinement of the athlete's physical talents requires a commitment of time and a level of attention that can easily become all-consuming. External pressures in athletic programs on coaches often lead to demands that encourage, rather than temper, the heavy emphasis on athletic preparation.

There is ample evidence of the abuses that can result. In some instances coaches have effectively made admissions decisions with respect to athletes, typically without particular regard for the institution's normal admissions standards. Another area of persistent abuse has been special programs for tutoring and counseling athletes. Too often counseling on course selection has concentrated on maintaining the athlete's eligibility rather than on providing a coherent educational program. Requests for favoritism in evaluating an athlete's course performance have been common and persistent.

The faculty must reassert its primary responsibility in monitoring the educational experiences of athletes. The candid goal of this endeavor should be to counterbalance the pressures in college sports that would subvert the athlete's educational effort. Such balance can be achieved only by removing all decision making that relates to academic matters from the commercial incentives that otherwise affect the daily functioning of the athletic department.

Several specific areas warrant faculty attention. These include admissions standards for athletes, where the goal should be to ensure that the educational talents of athletes meet the requirements of the general student body. In addition, programs for tutoring and instruction in study skills should be the same as those offered to non-athletes. Whatever attention may be given to the special needs of athletes, the goal should be to promote the athlete's fuller integration into the student body.

The faculty should also give special attention to ensuring that the athlete's individual curriculum has coherency and reflects normal progress through a recognized degree program. The temptation to elevate maintenance of the athlete's eligibility over substantive academic achievement should specifically be resisted. Because of the uncertainty and changes that can attend any student's movement through the university, ensuring that there is substance to the athlete's educational program will be a particular challenge. However, the goal of the faculty's endeavor in this area is clear: to temper the effects of athletic participation on the student's educational choices.

The mechanisms for faculty monitoring are already in place in many institutions. These take the form of committees and offices that set general academic policy and provide oversight. The issues raised are often of importance to the administration, and it is appropriate that the faculty's primary responsibility in this area be carried out through a structure that utilizes existing administrative entities and involves appropriate administrative participation. As with every other faculty function, the goal of the governing entities in this area is to ensure that relevant information is adequate and that participation is sought from all affected parties.

Coordination of the faculty's role in these endeavors can appropriately be the responsibility of the representative faculty senate or assembly. To the extent that there is a need for a distinctive faculty voice on such educational issues, the faculty senate or assembly is the appropriate body to provide it.

In some situations the faculty will find it necessary to use carefully structured ad hoc inquiries to fulfill its monitoring function. Periodic audits of the athletes' educational experiences will often be appropriate.

2. Institutional Policy Making on Athletics

An internal forum should be available in which the various components of the university, including the faculty, jointly deliberate over the formulation of athletic policy. A university-level athletic committee with representation from those with applicable governance authority would be appropriate. Because of the high degree of faculty responsibility for many of the issues presented, the faculty representation on such a body should be substantial.

An issue of particular importance is the method for selecting the faculty participants. The selection should be undertaken with a view to ensuring the independence of the faculty voice, and thus direct election by the general faculty or its elected governing body is preferable. Such direct election will also serve to define lines of responsibility within the faculty.

The faculty's involvement in the joint policy-making body should be undertaken in furtherance of a governance role that includes heightened responsibility for many of the matters under consideration. Thus, the function of the body is to be more than advisory.

A broad range of matters would be expected to come before such a body. The degree of finality to be accorded to such joint deliberations will be determined by the allocation of responsibility among the various governing components. Because of the mixed nature of many athletics issues, however, the joint deliberative body will often be the most appropriate device for resolving matters that overlap the primary responsibilities of the participating entities. In these instances its deliberations should carry a presumption of finality.

3. Policy Making by Outside Bodies

Because of the significant internal effects of rule making by external associations, a university should take steps to ensure that its voice is heard in whatever deliberations accompany the external decision making. Once the institution has formulated its position on important issues, the president or chancellor or other designated representative should be able to present the institution's position as a unified one.

A structure should be established to allow participation by internal components, including faculty, so that the institution's position is carefully and thoroughly developed before it is advocated to the external body. As with internal governance, the degree of faculty responsibility will vary depending on the nature of the policy in question. The faculty's responsibility, and hence its interest, will be highest with respect to those regulations that have the most significant implications for the educational experiences of athletes. The faculty perspective is also important for issues that have major budgetary implications and those that define the level of importance assigned to athletics within the institution. The same university-level committee that decides internal athletic policy may prove to be the appropriate vehicle for faculty participation. On matters of significant educational importance, full deliberation by the elected faculty senate or assembly may be necessary.

In external organizations that invite the participation of a faculty representative, the person so designated should enjoy the support of the faculty. The importance of the university's speaking with unity suggests that the representative must also have the support of the administration. The goal of mutual acceptance is satisfied by a selection technique that provides for the designation of the faculty representative by the chief administrative officer with the advice and consent of the faculty as expressed through its faculty senate or other representative body.

Conclusion

The faculty authority to establish and maintain general academic standards entails faculty responsibility to ensure specific application of these standards in the education of student athletes.

The faculty is responsible for reviewing academic programs for student athletes. The faculty must ensure the primacy of academic concerns in athletics as well as in other student programs. Protection of academic integrity against misplaced internal priorities or external demands in athletic programs, as in other matters, is the essential reason for the faculty's role in institutional governance.

The specific procedural concerns delineated in the body of this report require application and elaboration appropriate to circumstances. The overriding principle, however, is that responsibility for the academic welfare of student athletes is not an extracurricular or departmental obligation of a few faculty members and administrators; it is a fundamental responsibility of the faculty as a whole.

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