

## **COIA Report and Presentation to the UT Faculty Council**

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“The Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) is an alliance of faculty senates from NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) schools. COIA’s mission is to provide a national faculty voice on intercollegiate sports issues. Areas of concern include academic integrity and quality, student-athlete welfare, campus governance of intercollegiate athletics, commercialization, and fiscal responsibility.” <http://blogs.comm.psu.edu/thecoa/>

I attended the 14<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics held on Feb 17-19 2017, Wake Forest, NC, my first as UT’s COIA rep.

It should be noted that COIA itself is going through a restructuring with Mike Bowen, the Chair, stepping down this year. At the meeting much of the discussion focused on the need to clarify its vision and to have an organizational structure to meet its goals and a steering committee to drive COIA’s agenda forward.

A key part of the weekend was taken up by presentations by UNC Chapel Hill faculty Erianne Weight and Bob Malekoff as well as Deborah Clarke from UNC’s Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost.

As you may know, since 2010 UNC has been subject to accusations of academic fraud and dishonesty and a series of media reports emerged from 2011 through 2014 of various forms of misconduct related to their athletic programs. In 2012 a UNC commissioned report found that there had been widespread academic misconduct. In the fall of 2013 UNC decided to comprehensively document and assess all academic processes that affected student-athletes from recruitment through graduation and established the Student-Athlete Academic Initiative Working Group. As the online description, notes “We needed a clear and comprehensive understanding of academics for student-athletes in order to move forward. The Chancellor charged the Working Group to look holistically at academic processes for student-athletes and

improve student-athletes' experience at Carolina. The Working Group met at least once per month between November 2013 and March 2015. By the summer of 2015, the Working Group had documented a comprehensive set of 21 academic processes for student-athletes, from the time they are recruited until after they graduate”.

In February 2014, UNC hired Kenneth Wainstein to conduct a further root and branch investigation to find out not only what had happened and why but more proactively to suggest policy recommendations to prevent such things from happening in the future. Among other findings the Wainstein report, as it became known, discovered that for 18 years, at least 3,100 students took “nonexistent” classes, with a disproportionate number of these being student athletes, deliberately funneled into classes to keep them eligible and playing. The fall out of this scandal actually continues today.

One of the key take-aways from the presentation was the need for transparency. To this end UNC has produced an impressive website called “Academic Processes for Student Athletes” that clearly outlines all the policies that affect student-athletes together with detailed statistical information about everything from admissions and recruitment to graduation rates. See: <http://apsa.unc.edu/>

Briefly, some interesting points for us to consider. At UNC now if 20% or more student athletes are taking a course it is automatically flagged and examined. From a survey on student athlete time demands it was found that 54% lacked ample study time; 71% lacked enough sleep; 73% complained about the voluntary time for training was actually mandatory time; and 66% said they were effectively prohibited from extracurricular activities.

One of the other discussion points included the need to do more than pass new regulations and implement new rules, what matters most is a change in the culture of athletics towards prioritizing academics at every level. A related issue at the meeting was that there was too much focus on graduation rates as the sole marker of success. This was a concern for two reasons. The first is that whilst we should, of course, celebrate graduating students this should be a minimal expectation. And second that it can obscure more fundamental questions regarding the actual quality of student athletes' experiences at university.

Other key issues that came up included the need to better integrate the life of student athletes with the wider student population and for student athletes to be treated fairly by faculty; the clustering of student athletes around particular majors continues to be a national problem as does athlete segregation from the wider life of the campus, student athletes being prevented from taking Study Abroad courses being just one example; there was a concern that faculty on many campuses take too little interest in Athletics until there's a scandal and, related, that Faculty Councils should take a more proactive role in overseeing Athletics and ensuring the academic missions of institutions and the related educational values are aligned with the practices and policies of Athletics Departments; there was a discussion concerning the Faculty Athletics Representatives (FARs) and the extent to which their appointment by Presidents and not faculty, often with input from Athletics Directors, compromises their independence to really hold Athletics Departments to account; the need to have the faculty that are on Athletics Councils to be engaged and not passive; the need to shift the discussion from an important but narrow and often legalistic focus on academic *integrity* towards promoting an academic *culture of excellence* within athletics.

In summation, from the meeting it became apparent that COIA remains an important organization for faculty to voice their concerns and to help ensure that student athletes, really are students first and athletes second. Head coaches, Athletics Directors and Presidents all have difficult tasks in trying to square the circle of winning games and national championships on the hand, and fundraising, increasing revenue streams and dealing with wealthy donors on the other, whilst *also* striving for academic excellence. In this context it is clear that faculty are necessary champions of and for the academic well-being of student athletes and ensuring that the commercial pressures to bring in more money each year whilst expecting more from student athletes on the field, does not come at the expense of what really matters in the classroom.

If, as many Athletics Directors and increasingly now Presidents, like to say, that athletics is the front porch of the university, then it is vital for the front porch of an *academic* institution to have meaningful faculty *oversight*. As we have seen from the example of UNC Chapel Hill, and in a different but related context, the ongoing fallout of Baylor University's failures as regards

overseeing its sports programs in relation to sexual assault, the consequences for not being proactive can be extremely damaging to a university's academic reputation. To continue the analogy, if the front porch catches fire, there's a good chance the entire house may burn down. With this in mind I would like to make four specific recommendations to the Faculty Council based on my role as COIA rep, my four years on the men's Athletics Council, and my two decades of experience as a sociologist and scholar studying sports cultures and institutions.

Specifically:

- 1) **The position of Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR) needs to be enhanced.** The size and complexity of UT's athletics enterprise makes it practically impossible for any one person to carry out all of the important duties of the FAR. It is also important that the position be a rotating one so that no one person serves a term in perpetuity. The Faculty Council, in consultation with relevant parties, should determine the role and remit of the FAR and the support needed. My suggestion would be six year terms with three persons serving; one as Incoming FAR, another as FAR, and the third Immediate Past FAR under the leadership of the FAR. The FAR should be an ex officio member of the UT Faculty Council.
- 2) **The existing Men's and Women's athletics councils should be radically reformed to serve a serious oversight role rather than merely an advisory role as currently constituted.** At the moment there is no meaningful oversight of Athletics at UT. The fact that we have not as yet had a scandal of the nature and size of Baylor or UNC does not mean that UT is somehow immune from the same financial forces and pressures to win as these peer institutions. The Chair of the two athletics councils should be elected every other year from among the faculty members of each Athletics Council.
- 3) **UT should adopt the COIA recommendations regarding the establishment of an Academic Integrity Group (AIG),** which would be chaired by a tenured faculty member, the Council Athletic Representative (CAR), appointed by the Faculty Council. "The charge of the AIG would be to set new policy concerning athletics matters that bear on academic integrity, to monitor the campus implementation of all such policies, to report on a regular basis to the [Faculty Council], and to provide the NCAA with an annual report confirming the due diligence

of the AIG and its ability to perform its assigned role. Faculty members of the AIG could be the faculty members of the Men's and Women's Athletic Councils. The CAR should be an ex officio member of the UT Faculty Council".

4) **UT should conduct a similar, systematic and holistic overview of Athletics, similar to UNC's Wainstein report and produce a transparent, detailed and accessible website from this report**, clearly detailing the ongoing steps ensuring that in every aspect student athletes are students first and athletes second, and that an academic culture of excellence is promoted at every stage from recruitment, through course selection and majors, graduation and post-graduate employment. The seven-month review conducted by Gene Marsh was a useful but insufficient first step as its focus was largely on questions of academic integrity and NCAA misconduct, not on the wider question of enhancing and embedding a culture of academic excellence which is what UT should be striving for.

I should conclude my report with the observation that I fully expect none of these recommendations to be taken up or implemented. As careful observers will have no doubt have noted, three of my four recommendations are ones that Professor Ted Gordon made back in 2013, and in each subsequent year that he was COIA Rep and that were suggested by last year's COIA rep, Professor Louis Harrison. Given this track record of inaction by the university, whether that be by the Faculty Council to put forward these suggestions or the President and Provost to implement them, I would expect nothing to change this year, and for next year's COIA rep to make the same plea on behalf of faculty with the same effect.

But, I sincerely hope I am wrong.