



PACIFIC-10 CONFERENCE

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November 3, 2008

Dr. Myles Brand, President, NCAA
One NCAA Plaza
700 Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Mr. Dan Guerrero, Director of Athletics, UCLA
Chair, NCAA Div. I Men's Basketball Academic Enhancement Group
University of California at Los Angeles
P.O. Box 24044
Los Angeles, CA 90024-0044

Dear Dr. Brand and Mr. Guerrero:

Greetings. This letter is being sent on behalf of the Faculty Athletics Representatives of the NCAA member institutions in the Pacific-10 ("Pac-10") Conference. It expresses our concerns about some of the proposed recommendations contained in the "Progress Report of the Division I Men's Basketball Academic Enhancement Group (As of September 15, 2008)" ("Progress Report"). We hope that these views will be taken into account by the Enhancement Group as it prepares its final recommendations to submit to the NCAA Board or Directors and by the Board members when they consider the recommendations they receive.

This letter is written in follow-up to the letter dated July 6, 2007, from Stanford University President John Hennessy, writing on behalf of the Pac-10 Conference's Chief Executive Officers Group, to NCAA President Myles Brand, commenting on an earlier version of the Progress Report. In this July 6, 2007, letter, President Hennessy wrote:

"We are concerned that the Academic Enhancement Group could focus its efforts on reducing standards or evading the requirements of the Academic Performance Program rather than creating proposals to improve the academic performance of men's basketball student-athletes.

"One of the primary reasons for the creation of the APP was to attempt to change the culture of academic behavior that surrounded many sports, with men's basketball notable among them. . . . To weaken the application of the APP in men's basketball now would send the message that the Association and its members are not truly serious about academic reform."

We wholeheartedly and unanimously support President Hennessy's statement on behalf of the Pac-10 Conference's Chief Executive Officers Group. Therefore, please note as a threshold matter that we take issue with the following statement in the opening paragraph of the Progress Report: "The academic preparation of men's basketball student-athletes is unique from many other sports, and overall, they are less prepared academically than student-athletes who participate in other sports." We dispute the implication that there is something inherently different about men's basketball student-athletes. There is no basis for such an assertion. Not all high school men's basketball players are less prepared academically than students who participate in other sports. Instead, the problem lies in the recruitment strategies of too many NCAA Division I men's basketball programs. In the past, many such programs recruited men's basketball student-athletes on the basis of athletic ability alone, without reference to academic interest, preparation or commitment.

As President Hennessy noted, it is this culture which must change. Now, faced with academic penalties as a consequence of such recruitment practices, these programs seek to blame the students they recruited for the lack of academic success they have experienced. We respectfully disagree. The responsibility properly lies with the programs and institutions that recruited these student-athletes.

Thus, we are concerned that this opening statement from the Progress Report is really meant to provide a justification for the recommendations in the Progress Report that would reduce the impact of the NCAA's Academic Performance Program ("APP") as measured by Academic Performance Rates ("APR") on men's basketball. We urge the NCAA to oppose such a result. One of the most beneficial effects of the APP/APR system is to encourage if not require head coaches to now take into account academic performance as well as athletic ability in the recruitment of their student-athletes. We urge the NCAA to resist any effort to dilute or eliminate this effect of the APP/APR system with respect to any sport, and particularly with respect to men's basketball.

Unfortunately, the preliminary recommendations of the Progress Report that focus on "Academic Progress Rate Policies" are in fact designed to reduce or eliminate some of the effects of the APR system as it applies to men's basketball. We oppose all of these recommendations. We have selected three of them to discuss in detail below. The first 15 pages of the 22 page Progress Report is divided into five numbered sections. Section 3 is entitled, "Academic Progress Rate (APR) Policies." This section contains seven "preliminary recommendations," labeled a. through g. Set forth below are our comments on recommendations a., b. and c.

Preliminary recommendation 3.a., on page 11 of the Progress Report, is entitled, "Provide greater flexibility in the waiver and adjustment process during head coaching transitions." It recommends that in the sport of men's basketball there be relief from contemporary penalties when a decline in APR takes place after a coaching transition, and that a waiver process be developed that would result in the waiver of a lost retention (R) point when a men's basketball student-athlete leaves an institution due to a coaching change. We respectfully oppose this recommendation.

There is absolutely no basis for providing such an adjustment and waiver for men's basketball only – a coaching transition in any sport can be wrenching and disruptive for the student-athletes involved. But this is not a reason to gut the implementation of the APR process. In fact, and as the Progress report notes on page 11, each institution has an "institutional responsibility to foster an environment that supports student-athlete academic achievement and retention," and this applies even during coaching transitions, and even during coaching transitions in men's basketball. The NCAA would renege on this responsibility if it were to adopt this proposal. We urge that it not do so.

Preliminary Recommendation 3.b., on page 11 of the Progress Report, is entitled, "Revise the APR adjustment guidelines to be more flexible and to allow consideration of the student-athlete's level of academic engagement and achievement to the point of departure from the institution to pursue a professional athletics career, should that departure occur during his fourth year of collegiate enrollment." As the Report notes, currently, a student-athlete who goes pro must leave academically eligible in his or her last term in order for an institution to request an adjustment to regain the lost retention (R) point. The proposal would substantially weaken this requirement and allow such relief based on "academic engagement and academic performance."

We believe this proposal is ill-advised and unworkable. The proposal suggests that a judgment be made concerning the student's academic engagement and performance based on a variety of factors including class attendance, preliminary grades, completed assignments, and faculty reports. We do not believe that there are fair, objective, clearly articulated or administrable standards for evaluating the proposed basis upon which relief would be granted.

Preliminary recommendation 3.c., on page 12 of the Progress Report, is entitled, "Revise the calculation of the APR to award an additional point as an incentive to motivate early graduation." This recommendation suggests that when a student-athlete completes a baccalaureate degree in less than four years if it is a four year degree program, or less than five years if it is a five year degree program, the APR calculation include an additional point in the numerator. Thus, the early graduate would be considered a "3/2."

We respectfully but most strongly oppose this recommendation. The only purpose for awarding such an extra point is to for the sports program involved to use the point to disguise the deficiencies of other student-athletes who have earned only a "1/2" or even a "0/2," and avoid the contemporaneous penalties that might result from such deficiencies. This is misleading at best. It would suggest a level of performance across all student-athletes in the sport which is not accurate. It is also inconsistent with a fundamental principle of the APR – to focus on the academic progress and retention of *each* student-athlete in order to encourage and support *each* student's academic commitment until graduation. If adopted, such a recommendation could also have the unintended consequence of institutions pushing student-athletes to graduate early so that their sport program could obtain this extra APR point, and such early graduation might not be in the student's best interest.

In sum, we urge the Division I Men's Basketball Academic Enhancement Group to reconsider all of its preliminary recommendations about "Academic Progress Rate (APR) Policies." The current set of APR-related recommendations appear designed to mask the actual academic performance of teams and thereby evade the consequences of poor APR results.

Thank you for permitting us this opportunity to share with you our views on these subjects. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions, comments or responses to our views.

Sincerely yours,



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FAR, Oregon State University

On behalf of:

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cc: Collegiate Commissioners Association
NCAA Board of Directors
Pacific-10 Conference Chief Executive Officers
Pacific-10 Conference Council Members