

# College Athletics - The National Collegiate Athletic Association

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The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is a membership organization of colleges and universities whose fundamental charge is to "maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athlete as an integral part of the student body" (NCAA 2002). This governing body of intercollegiate athletics was initially constituted as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) in 1906, following a call from President Theodore Roosevelt to eliminate the high numbers of deaths and injuries common to college football at that time. The first constitution of the IAAUS (which became the NCAA in 1910) was ratified by thirty-five colleges and universities in 1906. In 2002 NCAA membership included 1,036 colleges and universities and a number of other affiliates. Approximately 360,000 students participate in intercollegiate athletics at these member institutions each year.

## Organization of the NCAA

Since 1973 NCAA colleges and universities have been organized into three divisions, each having separate championship events, legislative autonomy, and a distinctive governance structure. Division I (324 institutions in 2002) has the most stringent requirements for membership. These requirements involve minimum numbers of sports offered for men and women, minimum numbers of participants and events for each sport, scheduling criteria, and minimum and maximum financial aid awards for student athletes. Institutions with men's football teams are further subdivided within Division I into Division I-A and I-AA, based upon team competitiveness and attendance figures.

NCAA Division II (290 institutions in 2002) typically includes those schools with fewer financial resources devoted to athletics. Membership criteria for Division II are generally less strict than for Division I, especially in terms of minimum number of sports offered and minimum numbers of financial awards for student athletes. Division III members (422 institutions in 2002) do not offer any athletically related financial aid, but emphasize participation in intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of student life on campus.

Across divisions, the NCAA governance structure includes member institution presidents and chancellors, faculty, coaches, athletic department personnel, athletic conference personnel, and student athletes who work in conjunction with a national staff of more than 300 (based in Indianapolis, Indiana) to carry out the mission and functions of each division and of the NCAA as a whole. Many NCAA rules and policies are set by one or more of 120 NCAA committees that include approximately 1,000 representatives from member institutions. The NCAA Executive Committee, consisting of a small number of college presidents and chancellors from each of the three divisions, is the overarching NCAA governance body. Its responsibilities include dealing with key association-wide issues (including all legal issues) and strategic plans, ensuring that each division is meeting its mission and the general mission of the NCAA, and overseeing the association's budget.

Each of the three divisions governs via its own committee structure, with a board of presidents and chancellors from institutions within that division serving as the highest-ranking committee and reporting directly to the NCAA Executive Committee. This board is called the Presidents Council in Divisions II and III and the Board of Directors in Division I. Many policy issues are first tackled within each division by a Management Council that reports directly to the division's board of

presidents and includes athletics administrators, faculty, and student-athlete representatives. These governing bodies oversee a number of committees that each deal with a division-specific issue, such as championship events, academic standards, budget, legislation, membership criteria, student-athlete voice, and rules infractions. Additionally, there are a number of association-wide committees that focus on topics relevant to all member institutions, including competitive safeguards and injury surveillance, sport rules, opportunities for minority students and athletics personnel, sportsmanship and ethical conduct, research, and postgraduate scholarships.

Although the committee structures are similar across the three NCAA divisions, the methods for creating legislative policy have evolved differently within each division. In Divisions II and III, legislation is considered at each annual NCAA convention using a one vote per school process. Division I eliminated such a system in 1997, with all legislative policy subsequently decided upon by the institution presidents and chancellors constituting the eighteen-member Division I Board of Directors. This form of governance allows Division I to consider new legislation twice each year, as opposed to the once-per-year process used in Divisions II and III. NCAA staff members, led by the NCAA president, maintain the association's governance structure and carry out the policies set forth within each division.

### **Role and Function of the NCAA**

The original 1906 constitution of the NCAA (IAAUS at that time) reflected a desire of the first delegates (primarily college professors) to regulate college athletics and ensure that athletic contests reflect the "dignity and high purpose of education" (Falla, p.21). During the early years of the NCAA, this was carried out by assuming a role as the chief rulesmaking body for many sports, promoting ethical sporting behavior, suggesting that athletic departments be recognized as units of instruction within each university, and debating issues such as amateurism and eligibility for competition. Many of these functions and issues are still foci for the NCAA. However, the organization's role has expanded substantially over the years to include administration of national championships, education and outreach initiatives, marketing, licensing and promotion, communications and public affairs, membership/legislative services, and rules enforcement.

Although the first NCAA-sponsored championship competition (the 1921 National Collegiate Track and Field Championship) did not occur until fifteen years after the organization's conception, administration of national championship competitions certainly constitutes the most visible modern NCAA function. As of 2002 more than eighty national championships for men and women were being administered each year across twenty-two sports. These championship events include an estimated 44,000 participants each year.

As the national popularity of many of these competitions has grown, NCAA championship contests have become the focus of substantial media interest and merchandising efforts. By far, the most popular of these championships has been the Division I Men's Basketball Tournament. The television broadcast rights for this tournament were sold to CBS in 1999 for an average of \$545 million per year over eleven years. Much of the money made on NCAA championship events (and their broadcast rights) is returned directly to member institutions to support athletic programs, with the remainder used to run the championship events and support other association-wide initiatives. The NCAA national staff includes a marketing, licensing, and promotions division that deals specifically with the promotion of the NCAA brand and NCAA championships.

Early in the NCAA's history, it was expected that member institutions would police themselves on adherence to constitutional principles—a policy known as the home-rule philosophy. In time, the need to provide some form of national oversight in the face of the growth of the business side of college sports forced a shift in NCAA ideals. The 1946 "Sanity Code" was a first attempt at establishing the NCAA as a body to deal with explication of rules to member schools and enforcement of those

rules. Generally, the primary areas for oversight since that time have included institutional control and responsibility, the amateur status of student athletes, academic standards, financial aid, and recruiting of student athletes. As the numbers of institutions in NCAA Divisions I, II, and III have grown and the governance structure and specific rules of each division have become more complex, the need to provide assistance to member schools in understanding and complying with national legislation has become a priority.

## **Membership Services**

The Membership Services division of the NCAA national office has primary responsibility for assisting member colleges and universities in understanding and complying with NCAA and division-specific legislation. One function of Membership Services is to provide institutions and the general public with ready access to staff knowledgeable in NCAA rules and their interpretations. Numerous seminars and other educational initiatives are conducted each year to keep member institutions and other organizations (e.g., high schools) aware of rules and compliance issues. Membership Services (often in conjunction with NCAA counsel and federal relations liaisons) also assists NCAA governance bodies in evaluating current legislation and assessing ramifications of potential legislative changes.

The staff from this division also administers the NCAA's athletics certification and self-study program. This initiative requires that member schools maintain NCAA accreditation based on adherence to association principles and institutional control over athletic programs. In Division I, the certification program requires each institution to undergo a peer review of their athletic program at specified intervals.

Membership Services also coordinates the certification of individual student athletes as academically eligible for competition, based initially upon academic performance in high school and later on academic progress toward a degree at their college or university. Independent national assessment of whether athletes competing in NCAA-sponsored events are achieving reasonable academic performances has been a major association-wide initiative since the early 1980s.

## **Enforcement**

In 1952, subsequent to the "Sanity Code," a rules enforcement mechanism was put in place that remains to this day. Member institutions, coaches, or athletes in violation of NCAA legislation or principles must face NCAA committees and staff charged with investigating and punishing transgressions. At the institution level, the NCAA reviews approximately fifteen to twenty major infractions cases and 1,500 secondary (much less serious and often self-reported) violations each year. Secondary violations often result in minor penalties that may be determined by the offending institution itself. Major infractions may lead to substantial penalties for a college or university, including recruiting limitations, loss of athletic scholarships, banishment of teams from competition in championship events, or even disbandment of a team and loss of some NCAA membership privileges. Violations involving individual prospective or enrolled student athletes are handled through similar mechanisms.

## **Education Services**

Often lost amidst the substantial media attention afforded to the championship events, the big money aspect of college sports, and the rules violations is the substantial amount of education, outreach, and development initiatives undertaken by the NCAA through its Education Services division. This group is most directly charged with maintaining and enhancing the overall welfare of student athletes at NCAA member institutions. The division includes a sports sciences program that closely monitors trends in competition and practice injuries, informs rules committees of relevant injury data, administers drug

education and drug testing programs, and promotes various wellness initiatives at the national level and through grants to member institutions.

Education Services also maintains the NCAA research staff whose mission is to collect, interpret, and disseminate data of interest to NCAA policy-makers and member institutions. For example, the research staff collects data used by the NCAA to evaluate such diverse topics as the financial health of athletic programs, effects of academic reform legislation on member institution graduation rates for student athletes, and trends in minority hiring in athletic departments.

In conjunction with many of its championship events, NCAA Education Services staff organizes large-scale youth clinics that include sport instruction and life-skills discussions. The NCAA also is involved with the National Youth Sports Program (NYSP), which provides thousands of disadvantaged youths with education and enrichment activities each summer. Student athletes at member institutions are given opportunities to participate in NCAA life-skills programming and an annual NCAA-sponsored leadership conference. Other outreach activities involve promotion of athletic administration opportunities for women and members of racial/ethnic minority groups, and the administration of numerous scholarship programs for student athletes needing funding to complete an undergraduate degree or pursue graduate training.

As in its infancy, the NCAA is still involved in establishing competition rules for each sport, and in collecting and maintaining collegiate sports records and other historical data. Many of the issues that the NCAA deals with have been around since the advent of college athletics (e.g., recruiting violations, academic performance of athletes, competitive equity). However, there are also many issues that have come to the fore more recently, such as gender equity, the financial and commercial milieu of college athletics, and diversity issues. The one certainty is that the NCAA, in conjunction with its member institutions, will continue to evolve in scope and responsibility in response to the continued growth in popularity of intercollegiate athletics in the United States.

**See also:** COLLEGE ATHLETICS, **subentries on** ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIPS, COLLEGE STUDENTS AS ATHLETES, HISTORY OF ATHLETICS IN U.S. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, THE ROLE AND SCOPE OF INTER-COLLEGIATE ATHLETICS IN U.S. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.

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