

# Change not dependent upon structure

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I read with interest the article in the May 23 issue of The NCAA News entitled "Faculty group presents syllabus for reform." As the newly elected executive director of The Drake Group (TDG), I and the hundreds of members of TDG applaud the efforts of the Coalition for Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) to effect change in the ongoing intercollegiate athletics reform effort.

Bob Eno of Indiana University, Bloomington, is to be commended for his efforts in organizing and leading the COIA, while making it an effective voice in the quest for reform. The Drake Group has been instrumental in helping the COIA develop its recent best-practices document and legislative proposals, and we appreciate Bob's acknowledgement of that assistance. I and fellow Drake Group member Ellen Staurowsky of Ithaca College served on the coalition's academic requirements subcommittee.

Both groups also share many of the same individual members. Most of all, we are pleased that the blueprint we present for reform, especially in the critical area of academic disclosure, shares many similarities with the COIA document and its legislative proposals.

It would seem that the efforts of TDG and COIA would be universally accepted and encouraged by the NCAA membership and governance structure. However, the enthusiasm for the Drake Group effort appears muted at best by many in the membership. There is a myth that we are a group of incorrigible cynics out to destroy college sports. Nothing could be further from the truth. TDG, like COIA, believes strongly that intercollegiate athletics can and should be an integral part of education. Nothing in our mission statement or public efforts has ever communicated anything to the contrary. It is especially discouraging, in light of our plan being so similar to COIA's, to hear this myth perpetuated.

The Drake Group works from the premise that college sports in itself is not evil; it is the related academic corruption that TDG is working so hard to expose. At our annual conference in St. Louis in April, during the NCAA Men's Final Four, TDG member and noted sports psychologist Brenda Bredemeier made it clear that TDG believes sports have a place within the educational mission of the university. As Dr. Bredemeier said, "Sports can be used to develop knowledge and practical skills related to competition, character and citizenship. Implementation of The Drake Group proposals will go a long way toward enhancing academic integrity in college sports. Regulatory reform will not be enough."

The Drake Group is not a collection of cynical faculty members who want to do away with athletics. We openly support the values of intercollegiate athletics. While most of our members are faculty, others are former college athletics directors, coaches, and college and professional

athletes. Some are former high-ranking athletics conference and NCAA personnel. That diversity of experience on all sides of the academic reform issue gives us a critical mass of understanding on how to best accomplish it. We have been on "the inside" at all levels of college sports and we absolutely understand the issues involved.

So what really are the differences between TDG and COIA? It's certainly not that TDG, COIA and the NCAA want different outcomes with reform -- it is the approach in how to truly solve the problem that differs among those groups. The COIA is willing to attempt to achieve reform through the cumbersome and political NCAA legislative process. While TDG does not believe that is an impossible effort -- it is in fact admirable, and should be pursued by COIA -- however, we do believe there is a better and more effective method. Reform can and should be pursued by all angles possible, including government intervention if necessary. We simply present an alternative plan that will work, in the true spirit of higher education.

Percy Bates, the accomplished faculty athletics representative at the University of Michigan, states in The NCAA News article that COIA has a different level of credibility than TDG because it appealed directly to faculty senates and is willing go through the established process to get things done. The Drake Group believes, however, that change can be enacted without approval from a governance structure whose agenda often clashes with the purpose of higher education.

TDG believes that the NCAA governance structure and legislative process is not necessarily grounded in academic integrity and maintaining college sports as an integral part of the institution. We believe that despite the best intentions and recent sweeping reform efforts, at the end of the day that structure and process is still most concerned with maintaining the current commercialized and revenue-generating model of college athletics. The unfortunate end result will most likely be that COIA's best practices and proposals will remain just that -- practices and proposals -- and not real change.

The NCAA governance process, under the cloud of winning and money, will have the ability through various lobbyists, committees and subcommittees to water down, change or simply reject COIA's efforts.

The Drake plan includes academic disclosure and abolishing the one-year scholarship. We also advocate:

- A return to freshman fulfilling a one-year residency requirement before being eligible to compete;
- A minimum 2.0 grade-point average for competition;
- Moving athletics academic advisement under the control of normal academic advising units; and
- A change in scheduling requirements for competition to reduce missed class time (for example, reduce or eliminate the occurrence of midweek games in football).

These are simple and achievable reform standards, yet some people have called them "radical." Our plan enables faculty at institutions to lead the way and establish standards that are in the best interests of academic integrity and higher education.

To truly embolden faculty senates and get reform moving, we must first empower individual faculty members who can then ensure that decisions by senates are not made for commercial and revenue interests, but for academic integrity. In turn, that gives faculty the ability to defend their classrooms, and give our over-burdened college athletes a real chance at access to a college education.

The Drake Group plan ([www.thedrakegroup.org](http://www.thedrakegroup.org)) could be enacted tomorrow at every NCAA institution. But as Richard Lapchick, director of the Institute for Diversity and Ethnicity in Sport at the University of Central Florida said in a published article recently, "In terms of academic reform issues, if you could wave a wand and implement what they (The Drake Group) are proposing, then you would have a better landscape -- absolutely. But they are up against a pretty powerful set of forces."

It is those powerful forces against change that lead TDG to believe that more than 100 years of failed reform will continue. Enacting TDG's proposals at the faculty and institutional level, and outside of the current governance process, will demonstrate clearly that the academic mission and academic standards, for all college students, are the purview of the faculty. We believe it is the responsibility of a governing body to adapt to our standards, not for institutions of higher learning to attempt reform while maintaining an educationally incompatible and quasi-professional organizational model.

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