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For immediate release

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Drake Group Questions NCAA Division I Governance Restructure

New HAVEN, CONN. – The Drake Group, a national organization of college faculty and others has released a position statement today that is highly critical of the NCAA Division I Governance proposal to give the five richest conferences in its Football Bowl Subdivision the freedom to make their own rules and is calling for a blue-ribbon U.S. President’s Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics Reform.

Drake Group President Gerald Gurney, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Oklahoma, argues that “instead of providing cost of attendance scholarship increases and more benefits for all Division I athletes, the Big Five Power grab will result in extraordinary benefits to only those athletes in the richest athletic programs and will up the ante in the basketball/football Division I arms race. This concentration of wealth,” Gurney continues, “will also make it highly unlikely for lower tier institutions in the Football Bowl Subdivision to compete in the College Football Playoffs and tip the March madness competitive balance in favor of the Big Five Power Conferences.”

Because only 23 FBS athletic programs are making money, The Drake Group contends that pressure will be created on all other Division I institutions to funnel more resources into men’s basketball and football at the expense of non-revenue producing sport programs, increased student fees or elevated institutional fund subsidies.

The NCAA has demonstrated its inability to solve the financial and ethical problems faced by intercollegiate athletes. Drake Group Past President Allen Sack, Professor of Sport Management in the College of Business at the University of New Haven, points out that “first priority on the use of significant media revenues should be on the provision of full medical coverage and insurance, cost of attendance scholarship increases, an academic trust fund,

adequate academic support, especially for those who are academically at-risk, and other benefits that enhance the education, health and welfare of the greatest number of college athletes, not just those at Big Five institutions.”

The Drake Group suggests that college presidents should vote to override the Big Five’s ill conceived power grab legislation and call for the U.S. Secretary of Education to ask the President of the United States to establish a blue ribbon Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics to explore alternatives that would address economic stability, academic integrity, and professionalism issues.



Position Statement: NCAA Division I Governance Proposal (Big 5 Conference Autonomy)

Presidential opposition to the Division I Governance proposal through voting for an override and support for pursuit of Congressional intervention are constructive ideas that should be pursued. The Division I Governance proposal is flawed for the following reasons:

1. **Will not result in necessary reforms.** The NCAA Division I Governance Proposal (“Proposal”) does not address the need for comprehensive NCAA reform of professionalized Division I programs. The current governance system where weighted voting power advances the interest of the wealthiest institutions with the most commercialized athletic programs has led to the current broken governance system which (a) is economically unstable, (b) creates serious challenges to the academic integrity and efficacy of higher education institutions, and (c) has provoked antitrust litigation and National Labor Relations Act challenges. It is time to step back and consider a total revamping of the national collegiate athletics governance system rather than continuing down the path of giving commercialized athletic programs whatever they want.
2. **More benefits to fewer athletes.** Instead of the Proposal resulting in COA scholarship increases and more benefits to all Division I student-athletes, it will result in increased benefits to only those athletes in the richest athletic programs. Only 23 FBS institutions, all within the Big Five conferences generate more revenues than they spend. The remaining Division I institutions will struggle to find more funds to match these increases for even a limited number of scholarship football and basketball players, much less a proportional number of female athletes who must receive equal treatment under Title IX. Additional funds will most likely come from expenditure reductions in Olympic sports and bring to a halt efforts to provide more equitable women’s programs. The net result will be greater support and benefits for fewer athletes at the expense of athlete participation opportunities for the much larger majority. The emphasis on providing benefits to football and basketball players and potential of institutions not making an equal commitment to female athletes will elevate the potential of Title IX litigation.
3. **No clear statement of college athlete rights and benefits or educational priorities.** Issues of college athlete health and wellness, the right to transfer to other institutions, the provision of adequate nutrition, medical care and insurance, multiyear scholarship guarantees, and the benefit of highly ethical academic support systems should be the rights of all student-athletes rather than only afforded to the highest caste in a hierarchy of athletic programs.
4. **Further erosion of governance checks and balances.** The NCAA check and balance system of divisional or membership override of ill-conceived legislation is further eroded under the Governance Proposal which will require a higher proportion of the membership (66.6% rather than the current 62.5%) to rescind such actions.
5. **Ruse of concern for academically at-risk athletes.** The argument that governance revisions are necessary to allow rich athletic programs to focus on meeting the needs of their at-risk student-athletes is insulting. Presidential leadership is needed to focus on the issue of admission exceptions

and freshman ineligibility until reading and other academic deficiencies of underprepared athletes are remediated. This commitment to academic integrity and fulfillment of an educational promise is needed for all college athletes – not just those attending the Big Five conferences or FBS institutions.

6. **More expenditures on current athletes with no corresponding cost cuts extends the “arms race” into new and potentially unlimited territory.** The Proposal establishes a new recruiting “arms race” based on which institutions can pay athletes more with regard to monthly spending money, unlimited food, trust funds, numbers of scholarships awarded that include COA, etc. The focus is on spending more on player benefits without spending less on wasteful sport operating costs, coaches salaries and lavish athletes-only facilities. The Proposal continues to ‘up the ante’ with regard to the Division I arms race. The current athletics governance model results in widespread and significant operating losses in Division I and the Proposal will only make it worse.
7. **Increases competitive imbalance across Division I.** Because of the yet to be specified legislative autonomy of the Big Five conferences and the current financial resource advantages of Big Five conference member institutions, a two-tiered FBS will be created, increasing the unlikelihood of non-Big Five conference members competing for the College Football Playoff championship. The new lower tier of the FBS, FCS and Division I non-football programs will have distinctive recruiting disadvantages and a much harder time producing Cinderella teams in March Madness, one of the elements of the Division I basketball national championship that captures the interest of the broadest possible range of Division I institutions.
8. **Big Five/FBS selfish interest remains unaddressed¹.** The Proposal does not address the issue of FBS using its weighted NCAA voting power to block the establishment of an NCAA FBS football championship. If the NCAA offered a FBS championship and distributed such national championship proceeds to all Division I institutions, all Division I institutions could afford to offer desired benefit goals such as COA, full medical coverage and other benefits to athletes. This current \$470 million and potentially \$1 billion FBS College Football Playoff property is owned by the FBS conferences and 75% of the funds go to the Big Five conferences (65 institutions). Any reform Proposal must address this misappropriation of national championship proceeds which has only been successful because of a weighted voting governance system (which continues) and member fear of the unveiled threats of the Big Five conferences to leave the NCAA.
9. **Congressional intervention may be necessary.** The Proposal demonstrates that the NCAA is incapable of reform from within. A vote for override and a call for the U.S. Secretary of Education to ask the President of the United States to establish a blue ribbon President’s Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics is an alternative that should be explored. When open amateur sport found itself in a similar crisis of integrity and inability to initiate important reforms in 1975, a similar President’s Commission was established with positive results.

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¹ See The Drake Group detailed analysis “The Big Five Power Grab: The Real Threat to College Sports” in the June 19, 2014 edition of The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieve at: <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Big-Five-Power-Grab/147265/>