

# Who Accredits Alternative Ed Programs for College Athletes?

by Frank G. Splitt

As I said, with reference to NCAA President Myles Brand's Nov. 13 response to House Committee on Ways & Means Chairman Bill Thomas' letter of Oct. 2, 2006: *It is important to note that the NCAA testimonials do not tell how the NCAA accomplishes its (primary tax-exempt) purpose of maintaining the athlete as an integral part of the student body* [1].

To say the least, it would be interesting to have the reaction of accreditors to this lack of evidence and to the alternative education programs for athletes wherein the academic credentials and classroom experiences of athletes are so different from those of real college students. Can you imagine the impact on alternative education programs for athletes if accreditors required schools to measure what athletes actually have learned? That's exactly what is required of engineering departments in Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) Engineering Criteria 2000.

It would also be interesting to know the accreditation organization responsible for accrediting the general studies degrees described by Jon Solomon in his Oct, 29, 2006, *Birmingham News* article, "Athletes make academic end run." Solomon found general studies and 'Jock' majors prevalent in Alabama schools during the newspaper's investigation this fall. No doubt, similar 'diploma-mill-like' degree tracks have been engineered for athletes in other states by members of their school's academic support center staff.

Of further interest would be:

1. A determination of how the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) [2, 3], and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) [4], go about recognizing accrediting organizations that should be determining acceptable levels of institutional success with respect to student achievement. Note that CHEA, a private association of accrediting agencies, is not a statutory committee. Only NACIQI has an official role in the re-recognition process that gets accreditors the DOE's stamp of approval. Recognition by NACIQI should affirm that the standards and processes of the accrediting organization meet the criteria for recognition of accrediting agencies or associations under Subpart 2 of Part H, Title IV, of the Higher Education Act. .

2. NACIQI's position re: the use of the Collegiate Learning Assessment and the Graduate Record Exam as outcome measures of student learning.

3. NACIQI's views on possible breaches of academic integrity at multiple levels in America's higher education enterprise where integrity can be compromised by schools intent on winning at any cost. Rubber-stamp accreditation by weak, or, intimidated accreditation organizations make the breaching task a no-brainer for big-name schools. As Walter Byers, who served as NCAA Executive Director from 1951 to 1987, said when

speaking of a college's reporting on the necessary progress that has been made on the rehabilitation of at-risk high school graduates: *Believe me, there is a course, a grade, and a degree out there for everyone.*

School administrators seem to believe that outcomes assessment is none of the government's business — ignoring the fact that all schools benefit, in one way or another, from government programs. They are quick to appeal to the privacy provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to avoid disclosure of any information that could prove damning or embarrassing, especially in the case of the academic performance of the athletes in their money-making sports programs. An apparently misinformed President Brand sought refuge in FERPA in his vacuous reply to Chairman Thomas' question: *Would requiring the public disclosure of the professors, courses, and academic majors of athletes help insure that they receive a quality education?*

Without an independent outcomes assessment of student learning, the government has to take a school's word on Graduation Rates and Academic Progress Rates for their athletes. If schools are ever going to produce, collect and publish meaningful information about student outcomes, then NACIQI needs to force accreditors, and, by extension, colleges and universities to do so. Why? Because the NCAA will not require their member schools to do it. Disclosure of aggregated (Buckley-compliant) outcome assessments on the athletes in their football and basketball programs would expose the NCAA's phony student-athlete scheme to the light of day.

In the future, disclosure could enable the provision of tangible evidence justifying the NCAA's tax-exempt status. But that won't even begin to happen until schools require their athletes to perform as real students – maintaining them as an integral part of their student bodies where academic standards of performance for athletes are the same as for the general student body. And that won't happen unless and until disclosure is mandated by NACIQI or by the Congress, for example, as part of a quid pro quo [5].

In the meantime federal tax policy will continue to force parents, students, and other American taxpayers to help foot the bill for multimillion-dollar salaries for coaches, 'stadium wars,' tax breaks for wealthy boosters, and other artifacts of the big-time college sports arms race.

## Web Links

1. [http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt\\_Prompts\\_for\\_Congressional\\_Hearing.pdf](http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Prompts_for_Congressional_Hearing.pdf)
2. <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/naciqi.html>
3. <http://insidehighered.com/news/2006/12/05/naciqi>
4. <http://www.chea.org/>
5. [http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt\\_How\\_About\\_a\\_Quid\\_Pro\\_Quo.pdf](http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_How_About_a_Quid_Pro_Quo.pdf)

**NOTE:** This essay is based, in large part, on the author's Dec. 5, 2006. comment on Doug Lederman's column, "Can You Say NACIQI?" that was posted at *InsideHigherEd.com*, URL <http://insidehighered.com/news/2006/12/05/naciqi>. My appreciation and thanks go to Glen McGhee, Director of the Florida Higher Education Accountability Project (FHEAP), for his helpful comments.