

The TAO of College Sports Reform

Transparency, Accountability, and Oversight

By Frank G. Splitt

Stan Katz, director of the Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School and the author of a commentary on my first essay on college sports reform,¹ posted two pieces relating to scholar-athletes on *Brainstorm*, a *Chronicle* Website.^{2,3} The following commentary is based on my Nov. 26, comments on a report by *Inside Higher Ed* editor Doug Lederman⁴ as well as on Katz's pieces.

We of The Drake Group⁵ believe academic integrity demands transparency, accountability, and oversight (TAO). Here's why:

As evidenced by the large number of comments on Lederman's report and those on the recent set of breakthrough *USA Today* articles, there is considerable interest in the issue of academic integrity.

To be sure, the preservation of academic integrity in the midst of commercialized intercollegiate athletics is the primary focus of The Drake Group's actions. For example, the Nov. 14, *National Catholic Reporter VIEWPOINT*,⁶ provided the theme for letters that were sent to the presidents of all Catholic (and some public) colleges and universities supporting big-time football and men's basketball programs as well to the members of the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics..

The purpose of the letter was to provide an update on The Drake Group's recent activities, links to related articles, and a request for help in the form of an endorsement of our call for a significant improvement in the transparency, accountability, and oversight of college sports.

The letters urged the presidents of the Catholic schools to take the lead in college sports reform and the Knight Commission to give thoughtful consideration to its founding purpose and then move to help support the effort to reform college sports. For more, see Splitt.⁷

The Drake Group supports the introduction of strong TAO measures at the NCAA and in the athletics programs at its member institutions to help restore academic integrity in higher education—reducing the level of academic corruption that enables America's colleges and universities to pass off athletes who are academically, socially, and/or time disadvantaged, as student-athletes, i.e., legitimate students.

Of course, academic corruption is hardly the only form of the many vexing issues affecting higher education, but it is indicative of our collective inability to deal with a pernicious problem—saying much about how far our schools have regressed in the pursuit of fame and fortune. If allowed to continue, America's schools will inevitably lose sight of the meaning of academic integrity and the means of sustaining it.

The Drake Group believes that TAO measures would help college athletes receive a worthwhile college education as opposed to being channeled into diploma-mill-like degree programs that are designed and administered to not only maintain the athlete's eligibility, but also allow the NCAA and its member schools to claim tax-exempt status.

Without TAO, there is no limit to the academic shenanigans that can be utilized to field professional-level football and men's basketball teams.

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NOTES

1. Katz, Stanley N., A commentary on "Reclaiming Academic Primacy in Higher Education," *IEC Publications*, page x, Dec. 31, 2003, http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Reclaiming_Academic_Primary.pdf
"Frank Splitt's brief is a wake-up call for university faculty who truly care about undergraduate education. If we faculty think that the mindless expansionism of the research universities is somebody else's business, then we deserve what we get. Splitt is correct to argue that gigantism and corruption in athletics goes hand in glove with gigantism and corruption in the educational process. The system of higher education is out of control. In their own way, the Ivies are just as badly impacted as the Big Twelve. Even well intended university reformist presidents have not been able to stop the trend to financial aggrandizement. Education is too important to be left to anyone other than educators. So faculty must rise up to demand reform of intercollegiate athletics, to reject the hypocrisy of the notion of "student-athletes," and to assert the primacy of undergraduate education. This is a battle we cannot afford to lose."
2. _____, "Is The Term 'Scholar Athlete' An Oxymoron?" *The Chronicle Review Brainstorm*, Nov. 23, 2008, <http://chronicle.com/review/brainstorm/katz/is-the-term-scholar-athlete-an-oxymoron>
3. _____, "'Scholar-Athlete' Redux, ?" *The Chronicle Review Brainstorm*, Nov. 26, 2008, <http://chronicle.com/review/brainstorm/katz/scholar-athlete-redux>
4. Lederman, Doug, "Concerns About Clustering," *Inside Higher Ed*, Nov.20, 2008, <http://insidehighered.com/news/2008/11/20/cluster>
5. <http://thedrakegroup.org/>
6. Splitt, Frank G., "Time for accountability in sports," *The National Catholic Reporter, VIEWPOINT*, Nov. 14, 2008, http://www.thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Time_for_Accountability.pdf,
7. _____, "Best Remedy for the College Sports Mess: Transparency, Accountability, and Oversight," http://www.thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Best_Remedy.pdf