

THE BIG TEN CONFERENCE

STANDARDS FOR SAFEGUARDING INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

Introduction

The Big Ten Conference's history demonstrates that high-level athletic programs can be successfully maintained at top research universities and advance the mission of such universities. Incorporating athletic competition within the broader framework of higher education also presents challenges, however, particularly given the visibility of intercollegiate athletics and the passion it engenders. Good governance of athletics within the structure of each Big Ten Conference Member Institution is essential to manage these challenges. The public's trust in a Member Institution and the value of its intercollegiate athletics program are eroded when the Institution fails to implement sound governance principles applicable to its athletics programs, principles that are reflective of those applied to its academic programs and consistent with the values of higher education.

While not alone in this regard, Big Ten Member Institutions have experienced lapses in achieving sound governance of their athletic programs. All Member Institutions are affected when any Member Institution fails to maintain proper control over its intercollegiate athletics programs. Recognizing this, the Big Ten Council of Presidents/Chancellors (COPC) directed the Conference "to initiate an immediate review of the fundamental issues and systems affecting intercollegiate athletics, including the serious issues relating to control of athletics."

Institutions that affiliate in an athletics conference should have common values and common objectives. The Conference's attention to maintaining institutional integrity and earning public trust predates the activities of the NCAA, which did not begin in earnest until the 1960's. Members of the Big Ten Conference have traditionally come together to deal with important matters of common concern. For example, in 1972, the Conference formed an Advisory Commission on the Integration of African-American Athletes to advance their opportunities for participation in intercollegiate athletics at Member Institutions. In 1992, the Conference was a national leader in adopting measures and making concerted efforts to advance gender equity of student-athletes at the Member Institutions. The Conference has had a long history of establishing academic standards governing eligibility of student-athletes, and the Conference office and the Member Institutions have regularly interacted in a constructive manner to improve practices at Member Institutions, especially those involving academic and compliance matters. Conference attention to the integrity of the governance of athletic programs is clearly consistent with this tradition.

The Risks Associated with Failure to Implement Good Governance Policies

To be successful in their objectives, Member Institutions depend in large measure on public trust and confidence. The failure effectively to govern any part or program of the Institution, including athletics, undermines public trust and confidence in the Institution. Because of the high level of public interest in Big Ten sports, the risks of departures from good governance procedures in athletics are significant, and the impact of such departures on public trust and confidence may prove to be severe.

The loss of public trust in a Member Institution because of governance problems affecting its athletics programs has many negative consequences:

- the reputations of the individual Member Institution and all other Member Institutions in the Conference are damaged;
- injury to reputation reduces support for athletics and other programs among the Member Institution's various constituencies (faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors, fans, legislators, and the general public);
- lack of public confidence invites outside intervention in the Member Institution's affairs;
- student-athletes may lose opportunities for lessons in teamwork, effort, fair play, and the pursuit of excellence because of program-related sanctions;
- the Member Institution may suffer financial losses and additional costs when it is difficult for the Institution to absorb them.

The visibility, competitiveness, and passion associated with intercollegiate athletics combine to create a high-risk, high-reward environment which places great pressures on good governance procedures. At Member Institutions, athletics departments are expected to produce revenue streams through successful sports programs that will be sufficient to fund broad-based athletic programs without additional institutional support. Fans and boosters have high expectations and higher hopes, coaches and administrators seek the job security winning programs provide, the extraordinary popularity of athletics grows every year, and the financial consequences of success and failure are very high, both individually and institutionally. Fans or boosters, in pursuit of personal agendas or through a misplaced desire to "help" their favorite programs, are drawn to interact with coaches and student-athletes in ways that may circumvent ordinary procedures or violate the rules governing athletics. Some participants, by their celebrity status, obtain concentrated power far beyond that held by other employees or students. Successful coaches, major donors, and other persons of influence can seek to circumvent normal lines of authority and to exercise undue and improper influence over the actual responsible or accountable decision-makers. All of these problems are exacerbated if authority over athletic decision-making is unclear or is not formalized in official institutional policies.

For all of these reasons, the COPC proposes to address collectively the issues of integrity in intercollegiate athletics by encouraging the adoption by Member Institutions of clearer governance standards and to engage the Conference office to assist Member Institutions in implementing these standards.

Basic Principles

The Big Ten Conference Standards for Safeguarding Institutional Governance of Intercollegiate Athletics (Conference Standards) conform to the following basic principles:

1. Conference policies for governance of athletics should reflect a common commitment to integrity and good governance practice while recognizing the autonomy of the Member Institutions in fashioning their own organizational structures and allocating authority, responsibility, and accountability to their own officials.
2. Each Member Institution should have a set of governance standards that clearly define the authority over, and responsibility and accountability for, the governance of its athletic programs. Each Member Institution should be expected to comply fully with its own standards.
3. Intercollegiate athletics is an integral part of each Member Institution. Accordingly, athletic governance should be consistent with, and not independent from, the governance applicable to other university units and programs. For example, each Member Institution in the Big Ten provides that the President or Chancellor of the Institution is the chief executive officer and is responsible and accountable for the general administration of the Institution, subject to the general oversight of a Governing Board or a Systems Administration or both. Absent specific policies to the contrary, the President or Chancellor should, therefore, be the responsible and accountable officer for decisions made with respect to athletics.

Organizational Governance Standards

Each Member Institution shall have written standards relating to the allocation of authority, responsibility, and accountability for intercollegiate athletics at its Institution. These standards shall prescribe the governance structure for athletics at the Member Institution. It is anticipated that, at a minimum, the standards shall:

1. a. Provide, expressly or by general description, that the President or Chancellor, subject to the general oversight of the Governing Board or Systems Administration or both, and working within the constructs of the principles of shared governance held by each Member Institution, has ultimate authority, responsibility, and accountability for the administration of intercollegiate athletics, and
- b. State any exceptions to this authority, responsibility, or accountability.

2. a. Provide, expressly or by general description, that the President or Chancellor has delegated authority, responsibility, and accountability for the administration of the Athletics Department to the Athletics Director, and
b. State any exceptions to that delegation.
3. State the role and responsibility of any other institutional officer, board, or committee with responsibility for issues relating to intercollegiate athletics, including those officers, boards, or committees who or which play an advisory role to the Athletics Director or to the President or Chancellor relating to intercollegiate athletics.
4. Establish procedures to implement the expectation that those with authority and responsibility to govern the athletic programs of the Member Institution do so without improper influence from others within or outside the Institution.

Operational Standards for Athletics

The integrity of the governance of a Member Institution's intercollegiate athletics program is threatened when improper influence is brought to bear on Member Institution officials to make a decision that is not in the best interest of the Institution or, in more egregious cases, that violates the Institution's, the Conference's, or the NCAA's rules. Certainly, the line between providing advice or appropriate advocacy on the one hand and undue or improper influence on the other is not a bright one, but, at one time or another, that line has been crossed at various Member Institutions. Operational standards that address the exercise of improper influence on important decision-making affecting athletic programs at each Member Institution should reduce the risk that such situations will recur.

Each Member Institution shall, therefore, have written standards with respect to the operation of its Athletics Department and units within the Institution that interact with its Athletics Department. The purpose of these operational standards shall, at a minimum, be to:

1. Assure that the unit that provides academic support services for student-athletes operates without undue influence by Athletics Department staff, including coaching staff. Each Institution's operational standards shall, therefore, be designed to:
 - a. Prevent coaches from: (i) having direct responsibility for, or exercising undue or improper influence over, the hiring or supervision of any member of the academic support staff, and (ii) attempting to influence inappropriately any member of the academic support staff or any faculty member in order to obtain or maintain the academic eligibility of a student-athlete.
 - b. Detect and prevent (i) academic fraud and misconduct, and (ii) abusive use of independent study or clustering of student-athletes in particular courses or majors.
 - c. Provide student-athletes with academic support and counseling that is adequate and appropriate for their progress toward a degree and graduation.

- d. Route communications between Athletics Department staff and faculty regarding student-athletes' performance in classes through the Director of Academic Support Services or his/her designee(s) or through the FAR.

In addition, good practice suggests that the Director of Academic Support Services should report to an academic administrator outside the Athletics Department, such as the Provost or FAR, either exclusively or as a dual report to that administrator and the Athletics Director.

2. Assure that the units that enforce compliance with the rules and regulations of the Member Institution, Conference, and NCAA have sufficient independence from athletics staff to meet their responsibilities. Each Institution's operational standards shall, therefore, be designed to:
 - a. Prevent coaches from (i) having direct responsibility for, or exercising undue or improper influence over, the hiring or supervision of any member of the athletics compliance staff, and (ii) attempting to influence inappropriately any member of the athletics compliance staff.
 - b. Detect and prevent breaches of the Institution's, the Conference's, and the NCAA's rules.
 - c. Provide adequate and appropriate athletics compliance staffing for the Institution.

In addition, good practice suggests that, [for oversight purposes](#), the Director of Compliance should report to an administrator outside the Athletics Department, such as the Campus Compliance/Integrity Officer, General Counsel, or FAR, either exclusively or as a dual report to that administrator and the Athletics Director.

3. Assure that the admission process for student-athletes is essentially the same as that for other applicants with special talents. Each Institution's operational standards shall, therefore, be designed to:
 - a. Place final decision-making authority for the admission of student-athletes in the same office that admits other undergraduate applicants to the Member Institution.
 - b. Route all communications regarding prospective student-athletes between Athletics Department staff and the admissions office through the Athletics Director or his/her designee(s).

In addition, good practice suggests that the Director of Admissions should notify the President or Chancellor or his/her designee(s) of any inappropriate communication relating to the admission of a prospective student-athlete received from any booster or official of the Member Institution or from any staff member in the Athletics Department.

4. Assure that student-athletes are subject to general disciplinary rules and codes of conduct applicable to other students at the Member Institution. Each Institution's operational standards shall, therefore, be designed to:
 - a. Apply such rules and codes, including the same procedures and sanctions, as well as any Athletics Department policies applicable specifically to student-athletes and any team rules, to student-athletes.
 - b. Route communications regarding student-athletes between Athletics Department staff and student disciplinary staff through the Athletics Director or his/her designee(s).

In addition, good practice suggests that the Dean of Students or his/her designee should notify the President or Chancellor or his/her designee(s) of any inappropriate communication on behalf of a student-athlete in connection with a disciplinary decision, especially if that communication is from a booster or official of the Member Institution or from any staff member in the Athletics Department.

5. Assure that the medical and athletic training staff who provide medical services to student-athletes are able to exercise their best professional judgment in caring for student-athletes. Each Institution's operational standards shall, therefore, be designed to:
 - a. Prevent coaches from (i) having direct responsibility for, or exercising undue or improper influence over, the hiring or supervision of any member of the medical or athletic training staff who works with the coach's own team, and (ii) attempting to influence inappropriately any member of the medical or athletic training staff regarding the medical treatment of a student-athlete.
 - b. Place priority on the student-athlete's health over other considerations.

In addition, good practice suggests that the Director of Sports Medicine Services should report to an academic or medical administrator outside the Athletics Department, either exclusively or as a dual report to the administrator and the Athletics Director.

Enforcement of the Policies

The Member Institutions recognize that the integrity of the governance of intercollegiate athletics is important for the Conference as well as for intercollegiate athletics generally and that failures of one Member Institution affect the reputation of all Member Institutions. Accordingly, the Member Institutions agree to the following relating to enforcement of these Conference Standards:

1. **Annual Review - Members.** Each Member Institution will conduct an annual internal review of the effectiveness of the standards it has implemented in fulfillment of these Conference Standards.

2. Reports to/by Conference.

- a. After conducting its internal review, each Member Institution will report annually to the Conference on how it is achieving compliance with these Conference Standards and taking action to avoid governance-related problems in athletics. It will attach to that report copies of the standards it has implemented in fulfillment of these Conference Standards. Each Member Institution will also submit copies of any revisions to its standards to the Conference within thirty (30) days after their adoption.
- b. After reviewing the reports from the Member Institutions, the Conference will prepare a summary in which it will draw on the reports to provide information to the Member Institutions that will assist them in complying with these Conference Standards. The Conference will submit the summary to the COPC for review and discussion at a COPC meeting. The Conference summary may include recommendations for changes in the Conference Standards for consideration by the COPC.

3. Compliance.

- a. Each Member Institution will comply with the standards it has implemented in fulfillment of these Conference Standards.
- b. If the Conference receives a report or allegation that a Member Institution is not in compliance with these Conference Standards, (i) it shall so advise the Member Institution and require that it file a detailed response to the report or allegation, including means to achieve compliance if the Member Institution determines that the report or allegation is, in one or more respects, accurate; and (ii) it may conduct its own investigation of the report or allegation. The Member Institution will cooperate with the Conference's investigation.
- c. Each Member Institution will report to the Conference any violation of the standards it has implemented in fulfillment of these Conference Standards.

4. Enforcement.

- a. **Informal Actions.** The purpose of these Conference Standards is to enhance the integrity of the governance of intercollegiate athletics among the Member Institutions. In the event a Member Institution does not achieve complete compliance with these Conference Standards, the initial response should be that the Conference and the Member Institution engage in constructive conversations whose goal is greater compliance with these Conference Standards by the Member Institution.

- b. Formal Actions. In cases where a Member Institution persistently fails to comply with these Conference Standards, the Commissioner may recommend corrective action to the COPC. The COPC may request information from the Member Institution, which the Member Institution will provide, and the Commissioner, may, if so instructed by the COPC, conduct a more formal hearing on the matter. The COPC may adopt the Commissioner’s recommendation or any other corrective action designed to enhance the Member Institution’s compliance with these Conference Standards. Such corrective action may include:
 - i. Financial penalties, including a reduction of Conference distributions.
 - ii. Probation, under terms that reasonably relate to correcting the failure to comply.
 - iii. Suspension from participation in a particular sport, or from membership in general, for a stated period of time.
 - iv. Expulsion from membership.

The Big Ten Conference is a voluntary association of Member Institutions. The Conference Bylaws provide that suspension of membership, expulsion from the Conference, or placement on probation each requires a vote of at least 70% of the Membership. It is extraordinarily unlikely that a Member Institution would be expelled unless the failure to comply with these standards was so persistent and serious that it indicated the Member Institution no longer subscribes to the common values and objectives of the Conference and the other Member Institutions.

5. Effective Date

These Conference Standards were approved by the COPC on _____,
effective for the Conference and all Member Institutions on _____.
Between the approval date and the effective date, the Conference will assist each Member Institution in preparing to comply fully with the Conference Standards as of the effective date.

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