

THE FACULTY COALITION'S ROLE IN INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS REFORM

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Speaking for the COIA, let me begin by thanking first of all our gracious host organization, the AAUP, not only for the unique opportunity this conference is providing, but also for articulating “The Faculty Role in the Reform of Intercollegiate Athletics,” the powerful and useful report authored by Carol Simpson Stern and her committee a year ago. The AAUP continues to live up to its great history. The COIA is also pleased to be here in partnership with the NCAA and the AGB, as part of a newly-forged alliance for athletics reform, less than six months old. So we also want to thank the leadership of those two organizations for their friendship, advice and support. These four organizations are hardly traditional allies! That we’ve found common ground here is an indication of this issue’s importance. I hope our unity is lasting, and is a good omen for higher ed.

I know that the COIA (I’ll just say “the Coalition” from now on) isn’t the first faculty group to devote itself to athletics reform; the Drake Group deserves credit for that, and the AAUP, and many reform-minded FARs have also worked within the NCAA for some of the goals we’ve identified. Many of the major players are in this room. It’s good to be among friends. The Coalition may be the new kid in class, then, but we believe that we have our own distinctive contribution to make to the athletics reform movement. I’ll try to outline what that is in these remarks.

Speaking for myself now, and not for the Coalition, of course I’m pleased to be here; and I’m also perfectly astonished to find myself a faculty spokesman on an issue of such importance to American higher ed. I feel pretty awkward in the role, though, for two reasons. First, because it’s Bob Eno of Indiana who should be up here instead of me—but he’s on sabbatical in China. Many of my remarks will be from notes he sent me just before he left. (So there are really two voices in the following talk; by and large, when I’m being rational, calm, organized and to the point, that’s Bob.) Second, it’s always awkward being a faculty spokesman, on any subject, because as we all know the faculty can’t agree on anything, and that includes athletics—so how could anyone be a spokesman for the faculty? I don’t want to cover over the diversity of faculty opinions about athletics, and the Coalition can’t ignore it either. I’ll

come back to that issue.

It's one of the many ironies of life, then, that I'm here today. I'd like to take a few minutes to explain how it happened. Most of you should be able to identify with my story, at least in the beginning, because most of you are professors, and in many respects I'm a very typical professor.

I wasn't hired by the University of Oregon to worry about intercollegiate athletics; those who hired me weren't counting on it, and now, believe me, they wish I'd never gotten into it. I was hired to worry about the Old English language between the seventh and eleventh centuries, and *Beowulf*, the epic poem written in it.

It's hard to explain to non-academics, but not to you, that I actually get paid to keep myself expert in these subjects, to study them and write about them, and teach them, and train graduate students to do the same. I also teach other ancient and medieval literatures; and in my spare time I study ancient languages, translate an epic poem of Provence, chip away at a study of Indian literature, and run adult seminars in the humanities for the community. This is my profession. And as every professor in the room knows, in addition to all these things, I advise students, direct dissertations, serve on numberless committees and occasionally on the university senate.

Is it beside the point to talk about my professorial occupations? I think not; because when I talk about college sports, I talk as a professor. In this company, obviously, I don't have to defend the faculty's role at the university! But when it comes to athletics, I have to defend it every day. I have to explain what I do and how it embodies the university's mission, over and over again, to everyone, from the fans in the stands right on up to the trustees and the President.

Only the faculty seems to understand that professors are real stakeholders in the university, living as we do, totally immersed in it and devoted to its traditional mission. No one can stake a more genuine claim to the university than the faculty. What we do at the university isn't some sideshow; we are the main event.

One of the witty things that sports fans are always saying to me is, Don't you wish *you* could pack 60,000 people into the stands for a lecture on *Beowulf*? This extremely tiresome question is supposed to remind me that more people care about what happens at the stadium than in my classroom,

that classrooms are in fact boring, that literature isn't nearly as exciting or as popular as football—so who am I to be criticizing athletics? Obviously I'm just envious.

My answer is, no, I'm not motivated by envy. The parents of America aren't shelling out ten, twenty or thirty thousand dollars a year to send their kids to watch football games, I remind them, but to get an education. There are tens of millions of parents out there refinancing the house and going into lifelong debt, because they consider the classroom experience that I provide just that valuable. I have no doubts about the value of what I do. And for all of our concern about athletics, athletics is still just a sliver of the total university budget (about 4%). It's an auxiliary; and even if sometimes it seems like the tail wags the dog, nobody thinks that athletics is the dog and education the tail. A lot of the fans I talk to know an awful lot about sports, but they have no idea what a university is. That's one reason I run adult seminars for the community.

We are the university. We are the chief guardians of what makes it so valuable, what makes it worth the high price parents pay, guardians of its traditional high ideals, its academic excellence. Derek Bok says in his latest book,

Of all the major constituencies in a university, faculty members are in the best position to appreciate academic values and insist on their observance. Since they work on campus, they are better suited than trustees to observe what is going on. They have the most experience with academic programs and how they work. Most of all, they have the greatest stake in preserving proper academic standards and principles, since these values protect the integrity of their work and help perpetuate its quality.

Reading a passage like that at an AAUP conference is preaching to the choir, I know, but it's an issue now, because it's clear that if we don't continue to set the standards, someone else will—or *something* else, by which I mean money, and the Marketplace—and the standards won't be ones we'll want to defend.

To some people the university's a business; to others it's a state agency; to others it's an engine for the economy; and for others—many, many others—it's little more than a great team, like the dazzling Ducks. And the university *is* all these things; but for you and me, for the faculty, the university is obviously something else and something more: it's academic freedom; it's the arts and sciences; it's the

library, the all-nighter, the seminar table; it's liberal education, pure research, the sharing of ideas, the love of books, and the Socratic method; it's young people on a steep learning curve; it's Phi Beta Kappa and lifelong learning. And also, to be honest, it's the absent-minded professor—Einstein with his bad hair, Einstein who can't remember his phone number. I love the stereotype.

So to get back to my question, how did *this* absent-minded professor get involved with athletics? It's a question I ask myself every day. For the first thirty years of my academic career I had no occasion and no reason to worry about sports. I followed the Cavaliers, then the Rams, then the Ducks, all from the un-luxurious skybox of my ivory tower; until a few years ago, even the amazing Ducks had no connection to my life as a professor.

It's as if there was a firewall between the slightly disheveled intellectual enterprise the professor inhabits, and the glamorous athletic one thriving over there on our north campus. The two cultures, redefined for our day. It's been possible to carry out my entire academic career, then, at three schools, hardly aware that athletics was there at all. Maybe I should have been alarmed by the total disconnect all along.

But if I'm here now, I've obviously finally become aware of athletics. Why? Is it because the role of athletics on campus has changed, so I can't ignore it any more? A breach in the old firewall? Probably not: many of my colleagues remain sublimely uninterested in sports, happily focused entirely on their work. Many of them wonder why I'm so interested. I don't bother them with it. I envy their focus on their research and teaching, and I've become resigned to being, for the time being, their firewall.

That's one of the functions of faculty leadership; a few of us at a time take our turns in the senate, or on the athletics committee, precisely so the rest of us don't have to worry about it. By and large, I've learned, the faculty don't really want to be bothered about athletics—even those who enjoy sports; and even those who know there's a real problem.

My story began when I became senate president three years ago. It didn't take long to figure out that those who get involved in faculty governance, on my campus and on virtually every campus, quickly become *very* bothered with athletics. Once you're in a position to feel a little responsible for the university's direction, it dawns on you that the firewall between academics and athletics is in fact very,

very thin; in fact, it can barely hide an awful contradiction in the university you love.

Shortly after I became senate president, the athletic department announced a \$90 million expansion of our stadium. I first learned about it reading the front page of the local paper, over breakfast one morning. Oddly, on the same front page I also read about the latest round of cuts to the university's budget by the state legislature. I saw suddenly several things at once: a looming crisis in our academic budget; a second crisis in the relation of academics to athletics, which suddenly looked ironic, if not comically inappropriate; and a third crisis in faculty governance, since I never would have believed the university could launch such a huge and expensive project without even informing the faculty.

Only a few weeks later, I read something else in the morning paper, that Oregon's annual "Civil War" game against Oregon State had been rescheduled several weeks, right up to finals week, at the request of ABC. And this time it wasn't only the faculty who read about it in the paper: not even the provost had been consulted—his precious "Dead Week," with its elaborate rules forbidding distractions, had just become the biggest party weekend of the year. Earlier today Scott Kretchmar called final exams "sacred"—but not for us. Are you all aware that for many West Coast schools the March Madness basketball finals fall during finals?

Well, I know now that faculty leaders at almost all schools have similar stories to tell. I don't mean to imply that Oregon is special.

In any case, one afternoon a few of us new faculty-leadership types, senior professors who had never thought about athletics during our long careers, found ourselves sitting in the student union, wondering about athletics. That day we hatched a very simple plan, to contact the senate presidents at the other PAC-10 schools, to see if they had the same concerns; if so, perhaps the ten senates could act together to urge our presidents to discuss the issues. We were very, very naive; but this little plan turned out to be much, much better than we could have imagined.

For this is what we discovered: although the PAC-10 teams are tough competitors, and to some extent the presidents also see the ten schools competing in the academic marketplace, the faculties by and large don't feel this competition. Maybe the faculty don't disagree about everything; like other professions, our allegiance to our professional ideals is almost always higher than our allegiance to our

individual institutions—when those two things come into conflict.

We belong to a profession with a shared mission and shared ideals no matter where we work. If you set faculties—at least faculty leaders—talking to each other, they see the issues surrounding athletics and academics the same way, and they’re more eager to cooperate than compete. It’s not our faculties who conduct arms races.

So the PAC-10 faculties cooperated, and in the spring of 2000 nine of them passed resolutions endorsing Myles Brand’s new “Academics First” movement, urging their presidents, in Brand’s words, to “turn down the volume” of intercollegiate athletics. Faculty leaders in other conferences read about our little campaign in the papers, and the following year they too were cooperating to urge athletics reform on their presidents. In the Big-10 Bob Eno led the effort.

Some of you will have read James Duderstadt’s *Intercollegiate Athletics and the American University: A University President’s Perspective*. But you may not have read the epilogue to the paperback edition, written just after the PAC-10 and Big-10 passed faculty resolutions. Myles hadn’t yet been chosen to head the NCAA. At that point Duderstadt doubted that the NCAA could be trusted with reform. Just short of despair, however, he wrote,

All hope is not lost. There is one important ally remaining that could challenge the mad rush of college sports toward the cliff of commercialism: the university faculty. After all, in the end, it is the governing faculty that is responsible for its academic integrity of a university. . . . It is now time to challenge the faculties of our universities, through their elected bodies such as faculty senates, to step up to their responsibility to defend the academic integrity of their institutions, by demanding substantive reform of intercollegiate athletics. To their credit, several faculty groups have responded to this challenge.

At about the same time, Carol Simpson Stern’s AAUP committee was issuing its report, which said,

Notably missing from reform efforts, at least until recently, has been the collective voice of the faculty. The increasing prominence of faculty senates as vehicles for faculty engagement in sports reform is a particularly promising development.

The Knight Commission's second report also noted the first stirrings of our faculty senate movement for reform.

It was Bob Eno who brought the local conference movements together under one umbrella. No one had to be asked twice. This is how the Coalition was born, from a grass-roots movement among faculty leaders across the country. Since these statements by the Knight Commission, the AAUP and Duderstadt were written, the Coalition has found support from faculty leaders in virtually all Division I-A schools. Its steering committee, representing all six BCS conferences, has forged a "Framework for Comprehensive Athletics Reform" now being considered for formal adoption by faculty senates in every conference.

The Framework lays out in some detail the chief directions for reform in the areas of academic integrity, athlete welfare, governance, finances, and over-commercialization. Its language is flexible enough to allow for debate and local difference without weakening the drive for a national consensus.

Last week, senates at Iowa, Vanderbilt and Duke endorsed the Framework, and dozens of others are considering it as we speak. We've publically vowed to bring home from our work sessions at this conference two "best-practices" documents for member schools to adapt and adopt—one on the appointment and function of FARs, one on the design and appointment of campus athletics councils.

Now faculty senate presidents, if I may say so myself, tend to be a rather responsible lot of leadership types, not so much firebrands, malcontents, or radicals. Every campus has professors who hate sports and want to see them slashed or eliminated; but the Coalition, following Myles's lead, adopted from the start a moderate long-term reform agenda. We admired the Knight Commission's second report, we were buoyed by Myles's selection as NCAA president, and we're eager to see reform take place under NCAA leadership if possible.

Our immediate goal is to have faculty senates from coast to coast agree on clear, achievable, practical, enforceable and meaningful reforms, starting with academic standards and governance practices most clearly within the purview of the faculty. Unlike earlier faculty movements, ours relies on well established faculty governance procedures, so that our efforts can take official legislative form through faculty action.

Beyond these first achievable goals we are in for the long haul. The ultimate goal is to assist all the other stakeholders in bringing about comprehensive reform in the entire industry, for the sake of the long-range health of both college athletics and the university system. Our long-range goals lie outside faculty purview, and require the sort of alliances this conference represents. These goals include adjustment of season length and team size, cost cutting, re-commitment to amateurism, particularly in revenue sports, and reduced dependence on commercial contracts. Our ambitions are confined to Division I-A, but we encourage colleagues in other divisions to consider formulating and evaluating the issues that pertain to their athletics programs, and initiate a similar process of faculty engagement.

This is a propitious moment. This is the moment when forces converge. I think we all know that if reform misfires now, we may have missed our best opportunity to accomplish it. We also know that the immediate future is likely to present a variety of obstacles that will slow the pace of reform, and tempt us to say that we've gotten as far as we can get, well before we've set a framework for comprehensive reform in place. Bob Eno wrote out for me this list of obstacles we can expect:

1. The completion of the NCAA's initial academic reforms (the incentive/disincentive package), if and when it is accomplished, is likely to take the steam out of reform by appearing to be an adequate result. Without going further, to eliminate of the tremendous financial incentives that undermine reform, our efforts won't make a difference.

2. The process of approval by faculty senates of the Coalition Framework will be slow, and will only partly succeed. That's in the nature of faculty senates and in the unusual nature of what we're trying to accomplish; so we'll have to persist.

3. Some aspects of reform are truly difficult—truly workable solutions haven't yet been envisioned. The most obvious of these are in the area of cost reduction, where conferences and the NCAA encounter anti-trust strictures that make agreements to restraining the arms race difficult to design and sustain. And presidents—the only people who can attack these issues—have many other priorities. Inducing them to work together to arrive at practicable solutions that aren't half-measures will also require persistence.

The path of least resistance will always be to answer funding needs by negotiating ever more

lucrative commercial contracts; anti-reform is easier than reform. Faculty will have to keep up the pressure; we have to create and maintain a national network of faculty, monitoring movement or the lack of it, and holding presidents and boards accountable for their efforts. (This also means straightforward support for positive work.) Lack of movement among presidents will tend to suck momentum from the faculty effort—silence will disperse our focus. So the Coalition cannot slip into reactive mode. The Steering Committee will have to generate ideas, to report, and to maintain a constant pressure for reform.

4. We are one year into the faculty reform movement. While we've made progress, the momentum of disintegrating factors is keeping pace. For example, there are the destabilizing forces of conference realignment and legal infighting initiated by a bid to capitalize on economic advantages; congressional scrutiny inspired by the messy battle over bowl access and dollars; and what seems an unprecedented series of scandals in the player and coaching ranks.

The acceleration of these phenomena create additional pressure for reform, and in that sense they create positive opportunities, but unless we respond quickly, universities could lose substantial public credibility, and forces beyond our control will take away some of the options available to us.

Faculty, presidents, trustees, and others need to reach an understanding about the timetable for reaching a comprehensive reform plan, and stick to it—two years from now seems long enough. Implementing the plan may take a decade, of course—whatever it takes to induce all parties to agree (after all, we've had a century of abortive effort; a decade to reach a truly reformed equilibrium is a small price to pay). But this year and next need to be a time of intense, cooperative effort to reach long-term solutions to complex problems.

5. (You notice that these obstacles get longer as we move down Bob's list!) Fifth, faculty need to be both impatient and realistic. It is not hard to imagine solutions to athletics issues that conform to widely held faculty values, but that violate anti-trust laws, have strong negative unintended consequences on athletes with personal and academic integrity, or unnecessarily raise vocal public (and thus political) opposition. To be true partners in this endeavor, faculty can't voice simplistic solutions based on impressions rather than good data. We need faculty leadership to become well educated on the issues, and pragmatic in their thinking.

The goal is concrete—to achieve a reformed model for athletics that can persist over time in spite of real-world pressures. That means working towards a model that is not only practicable once in place, but achievable in the first place. The design is an intellectual challenge we must participate in; the accomplishment is a political challenge we must be disciplined enough to contribute to.

As if bob's list of obstacles weren't long enough, I'd like to add two more.

The first is, that the millions of avid college sports fans who crowd the stadiums or watch on TV have little reason to believe us when we say that college sports is in big trouble. After all, the games have never been better: beautiful facilities, great coaching and playing, amazing TV coverage and analysis. . . . From the fan's point of view, bigger is better, and there's no such thing as too much.

The fans, of course, can't be expected to consider it from the owners' point of view—the owners in this case being institutions of higher learning, mostly public, and almost all in deep financial trouble. Most fans would be surprised to learn that these tremendous popular spectacles make no money for their owners, and in fact cost most universities precious millions they can't afford. How could fans know about the danger posed by athletic budgets that rise at twice the rate of academic budgets? If they did understand these things, perhaps they'd worry that what they were watching was really the college sports bubble, not unlike the dot.com bubble or the Enron bubble. Rapid growth often spells disaster. But the fans probably wouldn't worry anyway. It's not in the nature of fanhood. So it's up to the owners, it's up to us, to slow it down before the bubble bursts—but the fans are not going to understand why, and they're going to scream bloody murder if they think professors are interfering in their fun.

The final obstacle is the constant temptation for those of us who get into this movement just to throw in the towel. Derek Bok writes very perceptively and eloquently about the problem of athletics, and comes to the “melancholy conclusion” that “it may already be too late to turn back.” Reading his book, and Bowen's, and Duderstadt's in quick succession last week, I felt a terrible heaviness come over me. What will it take for faculty to sustain a long-term commitment, when the forces working against reform are so great, when some of the best spokesmen for reform consider it impossible?

I've described the Coalition's reform agenda as a moderate and realistic one, and I myself try to walk the middle path; but let me confess, my personal feelings do fluctuate between extremes.

Sometimes you hear the crowd roar, and you root for the team, and your students are on the field, and you see how much the whole city enjoys the games, and the local economy is thriving because of them—and you say, Why can't I just join the crowd, and go with the flow of history? Why complain, and make them all so mad at me? Why should I feel responsible for reforming this giant? And please, please, let the Ducks win on Saturday!

But then there's another part of me which sometimes takes over, which is simply outraged about the situation American higher ed now finds itself in in relation to athletics. Oh, I'm lucky: the University of Oregon has a relatively clean, self-supporting, well-managed and pretty successful, sometimes even inspiring athletics program, and an enlightened administration; but still, the faculty leadership at the U of O is at this moment absolutely and totally furious about athletics. Nike is about to build us a new basketball arena. I suppose we should be grateful, but the fact is we don't need it and don't want it. Oregon is becoming a test case, an extreme example, a spectacle of arms race mentality and commercialization, a cartoon of what's going wrong in higher ed today. Many of you have local issues like this, I know. Oregon isn't really so special, and I don't want to be angry up here; I'd rather be moderate, thoughtful and persuasive.

I'll probably never have another opportunity as good as this to make my case. Oh for the tongues of angels. Oh for that rhetorical silver bullet that might convince not only you, the choir, but even the most diehard, single-minded, anti-intellectual booster who loves sports but hates universities on principle, that despite all the ratings, and the crowds, and the excitement, and the beauty of the game, and the glory of young athletes in their prime, not to mention the billions of dollars pouring through this huge success story of a sports entertainment industry, despite all appearances, college sports is not in good health. Health depends on moderation, and intercollegiate athletics, at least at Oregon, is nothing now if it's not a culture of wretched excess.

It was inevitable, I knew it, that the longer I spoke the sadder I would become over what has happened to college sports and what has happened to our universities during my thirty-three years as a professor. So I'll stop. I'll end with Bob Eno's final paragraph. Bob seems always to see the silver lining. He's the creator and the head of the Coalition, and I wish he could be here to see all these groups

together—because this was his final thought before leaving on sabbatical:

“Already, in Division I-A, faculty leaders and presidents are working together more closely than before because of this convergence of effort on athletics. Today (here Bob imagines himself at the podium with me), today the chairman of the board of the AGB, the national arm of trustee boards at the vast majority of our institutions, has spoken to us at the invitation of the AAUP, the largest national arm of our faculties—a situation we could not have imagined a year ago. The potential benefit to higher education of such enhanced communication and cooperation among faculty, governing boards, and administrations is enormous, and our response to the endemic problems of intercollegiate sports might just be the groundwork upon which a new understanding of shared governance is built.”

Thank you.