Dear Colleagues,

According to our schedule for discussion of the COIA academic integrity document, it's time for me to convey to you the comments I've received during the initial round of feedback, and for us to begin discussion, as a group, of concrete changes in the document. That discussion should continue for the rest of the term, and brought to a close at the meeting scheduled for January 6-7. (Currently, 20 schools have indicated they will send representatives, 9 have said they're considering it, 3 won't be able to, and 7 others have not yet responded.)

I have not, in fact, received many comments so far. It's not surprising; the initial response on the governance document last Spring was also very slow. I've sent a reminder to senate leaders at all non-member schools. Below, I've tried to arrange the comments that have come in by document section, indicating when there has been more than one comment on a section. (Some of the comments, I think, may not reflect a careful reading of the document, but I'm passing them along as they are. The only substantive changes I've made eliminate phrases that identify the source of the comment.)

All of the comments below imply a need to consider changes, and can help us focus in on specific areas. I have also received a pretty large number of positive comments on the document as a whole, including general support from some who suggest specific changes, as well as support for specific items in some cases.

I realize, of course, that for the next few days, we're all likely to be focusing our spare energies on the aftermath of today's election, but I hope that we can look at next week as a time to turn our serious attention to designing changes for the academic integrity document.

Best,
Bob

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Comments on the academic integrity document, as of Nov. 1

General: (1) Before making specific recommendations for best practices, it would be well to emphasize more clearly than the draft presently does that many Division IA institutions have procedures that, while not the same as the practice outlined, have the same outcome. Therefore it would not be necessary for those institutions to change their procedures in order to achieve something they already achieve.

(2) It is much too prescriptive. Campuses will likely wish to maintain their ability to choose methods to achieve goals, rather than have a small group do so on their behalf.

Section 1 (introductory language): When you make a general statement such as the opening statement on p. 2 "It is well-documented that..." please provide documentation. [The text reads: "It is well-documented that at most Division IA universities a substantial number of students admitted on athletics scholarships do not meet normal minimal admissions criteria."]

Section 1 (general): Our Admissions Office officials make admissions decisions for all students. To single out prospective student athletes for a different process would be discriminatory. Yet, COIA believes faculty should be included in the admissions process.

Section 2.2: (1) I understand the argument for four (or perhaps five) year scholarships. As you know this puts serious financial burdens on the athletic departments. Your point that, after say two years, the university as a whole, and not the athletic department alone, bears responsibility for scholarship if the student no longer participates in athletics removes some of the burden. But in this case, as well as others in the document, the financial ramifications of the proposals are not adequately considered.

(2) As an accounting professor, what do we mean when we "charge...the athletic department..." if the student withdraws because of the athletic department? Aren't we just talking about reallocations of money anyways? Is there any real sanction here for anyone? I don't really see where this fits into the document.

Paragraph following Section 2.2: (1) The language that characterizes athletic scholarships as "payment for services" seems unnecessarily harsh and a poor analogy, to boot. If the comparison with ordinary hiring is pursued, it will be seen, I think, that there are several major differences.

(2) In general, are scholarships, not based on need, really a problem? Maybe I am naive but it seems like "need" is hard to define; I mean, was LeBron James' family situation really a "financial hardship" so that he had to enter the NBA draft? I know this isn't the same thing but lawyer-types will twist any "need-based" criteria anyone tries to come up with. As long as the University does make allowances for needy non-athletes, what's the problem whether or not athletes are "needy?"

3.6: The Harrick family educational values got a lot of ink; do we really think there are similar issues at other schools? I can see restricting a coach from having his/her own players in a class they teach. I like 3.6: no varsity athlete should be taking coach-taught courses! The bigger issue: having coaches teach classes for academic at
all erodes the integrity of the academics, in my opinion. Realistically, I believe the days of the coach-professor are past.

Section 3.8: You prohibit student-athletes from acting in ways permitted by the general student body. The restrictions on the number of countable credits and the types of courses for credit show a bias against student-athletes. For instance, members of the general student body can take participation courses for credit. At many universities, credit can be taken for practice in the symphony (taught by the symphony conductor) and for service learning courses requiring no classroom participation. Similarly participation courses should be available to student-athletes. All these courses, and especially those involving athletic participation, should be carefully monitored for abuse. In my view, athletic participation courses should be pass-fail electives for a total of no more than two credits. But it appears contrary to the principle of treating all students the same, as much as possible, to deny these opportunities to student athletes.

4.1.2: I know this is a "best practices" but will programs really force coaches to step up and be accountable for the academic success of the team if they win a national title? I can't envision how a big time coach, otherwise successful, will ever be sanctioned for lesser academic performance of the team.

Section 4.2.1: Can we really "rein in" the length of seasons? I doubt it.

Section 4.2.3: (1) Even high schools sometimes schedule basketball games on nights other than weekend nights. If so, then the reform proposal to move gradually (obviously, this is recognized as an especially difficult proposal to carry out) to a weekend schedule for college basketball strikes me as quixotic to the point of potentially undermining some of the more important proposals.

(2) Divided seasons happen in hockey as well as basketball. And (next paragraph) many lesser sports (baseball, soccer, softball, field hockey, etc.) need to have weekday competitions; kids in HS usually have a weekday game and a weekend game in many sports (basketball, baseball, softball, soccer, etc.)

Sections 4.2.5 and 4.2.6: As some Universities move to on-line and asynchronous classes in some areas, is the "seat time so important?"

Section 4.2.8: Why are "final exams" so sacred? Our Scholastic Standards Committee is currently looking at relaxing some of the "mandatory final examination" rules we have now.

Section 5 (introductory, under Integration): why add yet another accountability layer for the student-athletes by making them utilize the University's "regular academic services?"

Section 5.2.15: I disagree with the unproven assertion in the italicized portion below this item; we have very successfully used a Counseling for Athletes Program that assigns advisors by team rather than having many advisors across one team.
Section 5.3 (additions): A small but important point: in the final section, Athletic Support Services, in which you outline tasks for OAAA, you need to add providing a program dealing with gambling. It might also be advisable to explicitly mention programs concerning alcohol and performance enhancing drug abuse (in addition to general substance abuse), and sexual harassment.