ACTION ITEMS.

1. Legislative items.

   - None.

2. Nonlegislative items.

   a. Automatic qualification.


Based on the 1:6.5 championship access ratio, the 2015-16 sport sponsorship numbers support an increase in the bracket size from 62 teams to 63 teams. The Division III Championships Committee did not approve the softball committee’s request for this increase because it would result in a bracket with an odd number of teams. Therefore, the bracket size for softball will remain at 62 teams in 2017.
Anticipated Pool Allocations
Pool A - 42
Pool B - 1
Pool C - 19

(2) **Effective date.** September 1, 2016.

(3) **Rationale.** Each conference meets the requirements of NCAA Bylaw 31.3.3 and has completed the automatic-qualification declaration form. (Note: Pool allocations may be adjusted based on 2016-17 sponsorship numbers.)

(4) **Estimated budget impact.** None.

(5) **Student-athlete impact.** None.

b. **Increase in mileage radius for championship travel.**

(1) **Recommendation.** That the mileage radius for championship ground transportation be increased from 500 miles to 600 miles in preliminary rounds of the Division III Softball Championship.

(2) **Effective date.** Immediate.

(3) **Rationale.** In recent years, several of the strongest softball teams in the country have been from the same regions (West and Atlantic regions), and sometimes also from the same conference. Current bracketing principles that minimize flights based on a mileage radius of 500 miles often require that these teams, which have usually played each other multiple times during the season and then again in the conference tournament, are paired for preliminary-round competition. These two regions also have the greatest geographic diversity, and the teams from these regions emphasize that they travel more than 500 miles by bus multiple times during the regular season to play conference opponents. Increasing the mileage radius from 500 to 600 miles will provide the committee more flexibility in pairing selected teams in these regions (similar to the flexibility that other regions have to separate top seeds due to geographic proximity) and, in turn, greater parity in the championship bracket and more opportunity for higher seeds to host. The committee anticipates using the extended radius for ground transportation only if it is required to separate top-ranked teams in these two regions.

(4) **Estimated budget impact.** None. Depending on the specific bracketing scenarios, travel expenses may actually decrease if the mileage radius is
extended. It is not uncommon now for teams beyond the 500-mile radius to opt to travel by bus rather than fly.

(5) **Student-athlete impact.** Participating teams may choose to depart campus earlier for longer bus rides, which could increase missed class time. However, student-athletes would appreciate the increased competitive equity and the opportunity to avoid playing the same teams multiple times that would result from separating top-ranked teams.

c. **Committee chair.**

(1) **Recommendation.** That Michelle Manning, associate director of athletics at Ithaca College, serve as chair of the Division III Softball Committee.

(2) **Effective date.** September 1, 2016.

(3) **Rationale.** Ms. Manning will replace Renae Hartl, whose term on the committee ends in September 2016. Ms. Manning has served on the committee for the past three years and will be an excellent leader and spokesperson for the committee.

(4) **Estimated budget impact.** None.

(5) **Student-athlete impact.** None.

**INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.**

1. **Welcome and announcements.** The committee chair welcomed the committee members.

2. **Meeting schedule and agenda.** The NCAA staff reviewed the meeting schedule and agenda.

3. **2015 annual meeting report.** The committee approved the 2015 annual meeting report as submitted.

4. **NCAA Division III Championships Committee actions.** The committee reviewed actions the NCAA Division III Championships Committee took in 2015-16 relevant to the work of the softball committee, including approval of publishing the final ranking conducted in conjunction with selections, effective 2016-17. The Championships Committee also recommended two items to be effective 2017-18: (1) adding nonconference strength of schedule to the secondary selection criteria; and (2) including teams ranked the last two rankings prior to selection (the ranking conducted on the day of selections and the weekly ranking immediately preceding selections) in the results versus ranked teams criterion.
5. **Division III governance update.** The NCAA governance staff provided an update on the following topics: (a) a Division I Board of Governors update, including a policy statement to protect participants and spectators from discrimination at NCAA events and championships; (b) the playing and practice seasons review and standardization of contest exemptions; (c) the Division III budget planning process; (d) recent changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act; (e) proposed changes to the financial aid legislation relating to aid from outside sources; (f) the sportsmanship and game environment working group (g) diversity and inclusion initiatives, including diversity internship grants; (h) the Division III home page; and (i) a new athletics recruiting quick reference guide.

6. **Committee report for National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) convention.** The committee reviewed the report that staff presented to the Division III coaches during the NFCA convention in December 2015. Coaches indicated that the additional session on the selection process and bracketing principles conducted by NCAA staff at the convention was informative.

7. **2016 championship.** The city of Salem, Virginia, and the Old Dominion Athletic Conference (ODAC) hosted the softball championship for the second consecutive year. The committee reviewed survey feedback from participants, the host tournament director, site representatives, committee representatives and officials. The committee met with the tournament director and the director of the softball complex to review facility improvements, student-athlete enhancements and community service activities. The committee made the following observations regarding the 2016 championship:

   a. The public address announcer was excellent and greatly contributed to a “championship atmosphere.” The elementary school children’s attendance at the games also enhanced the atmosphere.

   b. Participants provided positive feedback regarding the student-athlete banquet, community service activities and team barbecue.

   c. The fans enjoyed the daily giveaways (seat cushions, rally towels, sling bags and sunglasses) at the championship.

   d. The increased participation of Special Olympics athletes in presenting awards, throwing out the first pitch in several games and interacting with student-athletes, in addition to attending the student-athlete banquet and team barbecue, enhanced the championship experience.

8. **Plan for 2017 championship.** The University of Central Oklahoma and the Oklahoma City All Sports Association will host the 2017 NCAA Division III Softball Championship. The committee noted that in 2015, several games of the NCAA Division II Softball Championship were played at an alternate facility in the locale with artificial turf due to
inclement weather. The committee requested that staff follow up with the hosts to confirm the number of Division III softball championship games that will be played in the ASA Hall of Fame Stadium versus on the practice field at the softball complex for the 2017 and 2018 championships.

a. The committee discussed the challenge for site representatives and committee members to review warm-up music for teams, music played by teams on practice days and music played by hosts during competition to ensure that the lyrics are appropriate for all audiences. The committee expressed concern regarding explicit language as well as derogatory lyrics relating to race and gender. The committee strongly encouraged the NCAA championships and alliances staff to develop a list of songs (for example, an NCAA Spotify account) preapproved for use during all rounds of championship competition.

b. The committee reviewed the game schedule for regionals and confirmed that if classes for the host institution are still in session, the host will play in Game 2 on the first day of regionals. If classes for the host institution are not still in session, the top seeded team (even if this is not the host) will have the choice of playing in either Game 1 or Game 2 on the first day.

c. The committee reviewed the game schedule for super regionals and confirmed that hosts may schedule the game on Friday to start as early as 1 p.m. and as late as 4 p.m. local time. Game times on Saturday at all sites will remain at 1 and 3:30 p.m. local time.

d. The committee supported permitting the grounds crew to hand drag the infield once each game (for example, after the conclusion of the fourth inning) to provide a better playing surface for the remainder of the game. The committee believes the delay would be minimal and could be completed while the pitcher is throwing her warm-up pitches. The committee noted that the current softball rules do not permit dragging the infield after a game has begun. The committee will encourage the softball rules committee to consider permitting this practice.

e. The committee expressed interest in having a photographer at the finals site to take action photos of the teams and offer the photographs for sale on site.

f. The committee noted that for elimination games and the championship game at preliminary rounds, hosts should be encouraged to continue webcasting until the conclusion of the presentation of awards after the game.

g. The committee discussed championship merchandise and recommended that Event 1, Inc. increase the number of hats ordered and offer performance/Dri-Fit T-shirts instead of cotton T-shirts for teams to preorder.
9. **National and regional advisory committee rosters.** The committee reviewed the committee rosters and noted vacancies for 2016-17.

10. **Committee chair and vice chair.** The committee elected Michelle Manning, associate director of athletics at Ithaca College, as chair of the committee (see Action Item 2-c). Lindsay Eagan, head softball coach at Thomas More College, will serve as vice chair.

11. **Committee timeline and resource sheet.** The committee reviewed the committee timeline and resource sheet and made revisions as appropriate.

12. **Sport sponsorship.** The committee reviewed the 2016 pool document and noted membership changes to conferences for 2016-17. The committee discussed whether the 12 members of the Great Northeast Athletic Conference (GNAC), currently in the Northeast Region, would be more appropriately aligned in the New England Region with the majority of institutions against which they compete. The committee noted that the New England Region already has the most institutions (65) of any region for softball. Staff will follow up with the GNAC commissioner to discuss the issue. The committee also reviewed the automatic-qualification applications for 2016-17 and recommended that 42 conferences receive automatic qualification to the 2017 championship (see Action Item 2-a).

13. **Regional advisory committee (RAC) orientation webinar.** The committee noted that the new PowerPoint format for the RAC orientation webinar was helpful and effective in presenting the information to the RAC members. The committee emphasized the importance of having results available in the score reporting system when the RAC orientation webinar is conducted in order to demonstrate how to compare teams and explain how to appropriately use the Rating Percentage Index.

14. **Balloting procedures.** The committee reviewed the RAC balloting procedures and made no changes.

15. **Selection and bracketing procedures.** The committee reviewed the selection and bracketing procedures. The committee noted that it has been helpful for the individuals who will serve as alternates on the selection call to participate on the committee call the week leading into selections to gain an understanding of what will be expected of them. The committee recommended that staff also conduct a mock selection during that call to better prepare alternates and hopefully minimize delays in the selection process when alternates join the selection call.

The committee also discussed the challenge of separating top teams and maintaining the integrity of the bracket within the current bracketing policies. The committee recommended increasing the mileage radius for championship travel from 500 miles to 600 miles in preliminary rounds (see Action Item 2-b). If the Division III Championships Committee does not support this recommendation, the softball committee encourages the
Championships Committee to reconsider, during the next budget cycle, the concept the Championships Committee evaluated a few years ago of allowing a limited number of flights (for example, one per championship) for the purpose of separating top seeds and increasing the integrity of the championship bracket for the respective sport.

16. **Umpire selection process.** The committee participated on a teleconference with the national coordinator of the NCAA Softball Umpire Program (SUP) and reviewed reports outlining SUP highlights for the year and evaluating umpire performance at the finals site. The committee developed a list of recommended umpires for the 2017 finals. The committee asked that the SUP staff confirm the six umpires for the finals by April 3 to provide advance notice to the selected umpires and avoid schedule conflicts with assignments for Divisions I and II. The committee discussed the importance of coaches’ evaluations of umpires throughout the season and encouraged the members of the NFCA Division III head coaches committee also to submit umpire recommendations. It was helpful for the NCAA championship manager to participate on the teleconference the national coordinator conducted with the crew chiefs before the regional tournaments to ensure that the information provided to the crew chiefs was consistent with information provided to the site representatives. The committee and the national coordinator of officials determined that the national coordinator will confirm the initial assignments for the crew assigned at each preliminary round. After each umpire has worked as the home plate umpire, the NCAA site representative and the designated crew chief will review the coaches’ evaluation forms and work together to confirm crew assignments for subsequent games rather than follow a predetermined rotation. Also, the committee members and site representatives will complete the evaluation form posted on Arbiter.com to help the SUP identify which umpires should advance from regionals to super regionals.

17. **Softball playing rules and bat testing updates.** The NCAA softball secretary-rules editor, softball equipment consultant and playing rules staff reviewed a summary of the 2016 NCAA Softball Rules Survey and the results of postchampionship bat testing.

18. **National Fastpitch Coaches Association update.** The committee participated on a teleconference with the Division III liaison from the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) to review feedback from coaches relating to the championship. The committee expressed appreciation that the NFCA liaison traveled to Salem to attend the student-athlete banquet and present the NFCA All-America awards. The committee and liaison confirmed their joint support of continuing to have NCAA staff and committee members present information to coaches at the NFCA convention regarding key topics such as the selection process and bracketing policies. NCAA staff also will continue to participate on the NFCA Division III head coaches committee’s monthly teleconferences.

19. **Academic and membership affairs update.** A member of the academic and membership affairs staff provided an update regarding Division I surveys relating to the student-athlete experience and time demands. Committee members received a copy of the NCAA Division
III Athletics Recruiting/Communication Quick Reference Guide and were informed that the PowerPoint presentations from the 2016 NCAA Regional Rule Seminars, including a review of Division III legislation and interpretations relating to camps and clinics, are available on ncaa.org.

20. Mailings. The committee reviewed the correspondence and selections mailings for 2015-16 and made revisions as appropriate. The committee noted that hosts should email hotel information to teams assigned to their respective site immediately following the online selection show, and hosts also should email a participant manual (complete except for confirmed practice times) to the teams before the participant teleconference.

21. Manuals and agendas. The committee reviewed the softball host operations manual, pre-championship manual, participant manuals, committee operations manual and site representative manual and made revisions as appropriate. The committee also reviewed and updated the agendas for teleconferences with hosts, teams and site representatives.

22. Future dates and sites. The committee reviewed the dates for regionals, super regionals and the finals for the softball championship for 2017 and 2018. The committee also reviewed the bid process, facility specifications and timeline for the next championship bid cycle (2018-19 through 2021-22). The committee identified June 19-21 as the dates for the 2017 annual committee meeting. The committee will arrive June 19 and depart June 21.

23. Other business. The NCAA Division III Management Council Playing and Practice Seasons Subcommittee requested feedback from the Division III baseball and softball committees regarding the concept of allowing member institutions the option of establishing a two-period model for baseball and/or softball. The softball committee noted that a split season would allow institutions to spread the number of contests and the amount of missed class time across two seasons, and possibly play more contests in better weather. However, the committee voted not to support the two-period model for softball for the following reasons:

   a. Consistent with the Division III philosophy, many softball student-athletes use the fall semester to participate in other academic and campus activities (for example, semester abroad, student teaching, internships, lab classes, multisport athletes, etc.). Academic loads are usually heavier in the fall and missed class time in the fall would be a concern.

   b. Scheduling could be challenging. Adding softball or baseball contests in the fall would add to the facility use and athletic training responsibilities for the fall sports. In addition, institutions would be dependent upon the scheduling availability of institutions near them (for example, other institutions must also opt for the two-period model to schedule fall contests, and opponents may not have contests available to
schedule in the spring if they competed in the fall). Some conferences already do not permit nontraditional seasons.

c. Baseball teams usually play eight to 12 more dates of competition than softball because of single games. Softball teams play a large percentage of their schedule on spring break and do not miss as much class time as baseball teams.

d. It is helpful for freshman softball student-athletes to acclimate during the school year and then begin their season in the spring instead of starting to play right away in the fall.

The committee noted that the NFCA Division III head coaches committee discussed this issue at the NFCA convention this past December, and that group also did not support the two-period model for softball.

Committee Chair:  Renae Hartl, Luther College, Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Conference  
Staff Liaison:       Jan Gentry, Championships and Alliances

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robin Baker, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire; Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlie Dobbins, William Peace University; USA South Athletic Conference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lindsay Eagan, Thomas More College; Presidents’ Athletic Conference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Renae Hartl, Luther College; Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joan Howard, University of New England; Commonwealth Coast Conference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Janet Lloyd, Chapman University; Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michelle Manning, Ithaca College; Empire 8.</td>
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<td>Kim Wilson, Rowan University; New Jersey Athletic Conference.</td>
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<th>Guests in Attendance:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dee Abrahamson, NCAA Softball Equipment Consultant (by teleconference).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carey Harveycutter, City of Salem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dave Hines, National Fastpitch Coaches Association (by teleconference).</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Shaner, City of Salem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vickie Van Kleeck, NCAA Softball Secretary-Rules Editor (by teleconference).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donna Vavrince, NCAA Softball Umpire Program (by teleconference).</td>
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<th>NCAA Staff Support in Attendance:</th>
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<td>Jan Gentry, Championships and Alliances.</td>
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Barb Hallam, Championships and Alliances.

**Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:**

- Ashlee Ferguson, Championships and Alliances.
- Maureen Harty, Academic and Membership Affairs.
- Louise McCleary, Governance.