

## **ISSUE TWO: THE PHILOSOPHY AND IDENTITY OF DIVISION III**

### Identification of Issues

The Division III philosophy statement ultimately binds the division's diverse and growing membership. The statement is a unique document that clearly distinguishes the division's member schools from their colleagues in Divisions I and II. It also forms the basis of the division's legislative standards and administrative requirements. As the size and diversity of the division increase, it will become more important to ensure that the division's membership shares an understanding of and commitment to the philosophy, and related legislative standards. It also will become more important to establish a better understanding and appreciation of the Division III model within the Association, and among other key "external" constituents, especially prospective students and parents.

### Background

Division III was created in 1973, when the NCAA adopted its current, three-division format to replace the former University and College Division structure that had existed since 1957. Member schools that ultimately joined Division III played a key role in the development and approval of the three-division model, insisting that their philosophical and competitive interests justified a separate membership division.

In 1997, the NCAA implemented its current governance structure. This structure emphasizes three principles. The first principle is greater legislative autonomy for each division (also known as greater "federation"). The second principle is presidential leadership, including the creation of presidential bodies at the top of the Association-wide and divisional governance structures. The third principle was administrative simplification, including the establishment of presidential oversight for budget and championships issues.

During the last seven years, Division III has engaged in a broad-based, comprehensive and extended review of its philosophical principles and related legislative standards. It should be noted that, at least in part, the findings described in the books "The Game of Life" and its sequel, "Reclaiming the Game," served as a catalyst related to these discussions.

This Division III effort can be described in three phases. The first phase, known informally as the "Future of Division III-Phase I," culminated in the adoption of a landmark legislative package at the 2004 NCAA Convention that included the establishment of an annual financial aid reporting process; the elimination of redshirting; and significant reductions to the length and

competitive opportunities within the playing season, including the nontraditional segment. The “Future of Division III-Phase II” discussions saw the adoption at the 2006 Convention of legislation to increase minimum sports sponsorship; enhance the requirements necessary to achieve and maintain active membership in the division; and require the regular completion of a conference self-study. In April, the Division III governance structure formally concluded the third phase of discussions. Those deliberations began in 2006 regarding possible changes to the division’s membership structure to accommodate future growth and diversity. The discussions have now evolved into the current consideration of the best ways to address future issues within the existing membership structure.

Research suggests that for the general public, Division III has no clear identity, especially beyond its prohibition of athletics aid. In fact, some research suggests much of the public has grouped together all athletics programs outside of Division I. Division II recently has undertaken a strategic positioning exercise, with related branding and marketing efforts (e.g., “I Chose Division II”), to change its perception. But it remains true that Division III has not engaged in a comprehensive branding or marketing program since the creation of its philosophy statement.

Research also suggests that the national sport culture at secondary schools and earlier levels is fostering increasingly unrealistic expectations among participants and their families. A March, 2008, New York Times series, for example, documented the pervasiveness of the following trends: sport specialization at an earlier age; the related expectation for year-round practice and competition in the sport of choice; the hope and belief, especially among parents, that sport specialization will result in the opportunity for a full athletics scholarship; and an underlying assumption that athletics is a primary way, if not the primary way, to access higher education. The series also documented the unfulfilled expectations of many participants in scholarship sports, including: the prevalence of partial, rather than full scholarships; participant “burn out”; the desire by participants for a more integrated educational experience; and the reality that academics, rather than athletics, remains the most likely way to access a college scholarship.

### Division III Philosophical Principles

At its core, the philosophy statement emphasizes the educational component of intercollegiate athletics, and the integration of the athletics program into the school’s educational mission and structure. Members do not offer athletics programs to generate revenue or to entertain the public. They offer athletics because of the inherent educational value to its participants. To that end, student-athletes do not receive athletics aid, and are expected to be treated and succeed like

other students. Coaches also are recognized as educators. Other philosophical tenets are described in the remaining white papers.

The philosophy statement has evolved during its twenty-five year history. It was developed between 1977 and 1982 by a membership panel that included significant presidential representation. The original statement was based on “existing practices and ideals” in the division, and noted that some components had “universal applicability” and existed in the bylaws, while other components were, “subject to differing treatment because of special institutional policies and concerns.” Ultimately, the statement was intended to “inform the development of legislation” and “guide member institutions in planning and implementing athletics programs.”

The philosophy statement was not adopted until 1983. Thus, Division III existed for approximately 10 years before the statement was established formally. During the interim, the division established its first championships program (1973-74) and an initial prohibition on financial aid beyond need (1974).

The adoption of the statement was closely followed by the establishment of the NCAA’s Presidents Commission in 1984. While the creation of the commission was not directly related to the creation of the statement, it seems clear that the philosophy statement helped to facilitate and guide the greater involvement of Division III presidents within the Association’s governance structure. Division III presidents reaffirmed their support for the statement through an evaluation and feedback process in 1988. It is important to note, however, that the statement has never contained a specific tenet regarding the expectations for presidential leadership of intercollegiate athletics programs at the local, conference and national levels.

During 1994-95, a working group reviewed the statement, to ensure that it would continue to serve as a solid foundation for the division during the pending discussions regarding the establishment of a more federated governance structure. Among its recommendations, subsequently approved by the division, were provisions to preclude club and intramural sports in the consideration of sports sponsorship, to emphasize sportsmanship, to call for fairness, openness and honesty in intercollegiate athletics programs, and to distinguish conference championships from the division’s national championships program.

The membership has approved subsequent amendments to the statement. These include an Association-wide initiative to emphasize gender and ethnic diversity in 1999.

### Identification of Options

The survey and town hall forums explored several options with the membership regarding the philosophy and identity of Division III. These included:

- A further review and revision of the Division III philosophy to better achieve a shared understanding and commitment to its principles, and to guide the consideration of future legislative and policy initiatives.
- The consideration of a full range of marketing and branding efforts to enhance the identity and understanding of Division III.

### Summary of Survey and Membership Feedback

The recent membership survey indicated important current perceptions regarding intercollegiate athletics in the division:

- When asked if athletics helps in establishing a diverse student body on their campus, 84 % agree or strongly agree.
- When asked if there is an appropriate balance between academics and athletics on their campus, 93% agree or strongly agree.
- When asked if legislative standards are necessary to ensure opportunities for student-athlete engagement in the life of the school beyond athletics, only 34% agree or strongly agree, while another 21% somewhat agree. 30% disagree or strongly disagree and another 14% somewhat disagree.
- When asked if athletics participation is just as valuable to student development as any other extra-curricular activity an overwhelming 97% agree or strongly agree.
- When asked if current Division III legislative standards are consistent with the school's perspective on intercollegiate athletics, 76% agree or strongly agree and 18% somewhat agree.

- When asked if Division III legislative standards should generally become less permissive, 11% agree or strongly agree while another 16% somewhat agree. Approximately 52% disagree or strongly disagree, while another 17% somewhat disagree. This indicates that approximately 27% of the Division III membership believes, to some extent, that Division III legislative standards should generally become less permissive.
- The converse question found a similar response. When asked if Division III legislative standards should generally become more permissive, 12% agree or strongly agree, while 15% somewhat agree. Approximately 53% disagree or strongly disagree, while another 16% somewhat disagree. Again, this indicates that approximately 27% of the Division III membership believes, to some extent, that Division III legislative standards should generally become more permissive.

The town hall forums reinforced several points. First, there is widespread affinity within the membership for Division III. The affinity includes the division's philosophy, its role and identity as a competitive grouping and its membership structure.

Second, the membership has a strong appreciation for the Division III philosophy. Member schools believe they apply it. The philosophy may need to be better understood and applied at the 'grass roots.' Coaches and newer administrators may not understand the philosophy, and schools should give it greater emphasis when making administrative decisions (e.g., scheduling, hiring, and evaluation).

Third, in practice, the interpretation and application of the philosophy vary. These differences reflect the diversity of the division's membership. Institutional missions and student-athlete needs help to distinguish institutional perspectives regarding the interpretation and application of the philosophy. Discussion related to the definition of a "broad-based program" served as an example. Ultimately, concern was expressed regarding the danger of a "selective emphasis" of the philosophy. A broad-based application of the philosophy best supports the division's fundamental educational mission.

Fourth, regarding the image of Division III, feedback emphasized that a comprehensive marketing effort focusing on the existing Division III is preferable to the launching of a new Division III "brand." Such an effort could focus on a better definition of and appreciation for the division and the unique role it serves within the NCAA. While the division has many strengths and benefits for its member schools and its student-athletes, they are underappreciated by

institutional constituents and not well understood by “external” constituents (e.g., parents, prospects, alumni and media). Participants emphasized that Division III is a great model. The division should tell its story in a positive way, without downgrading the other divisions. The primary emphasis on education and integration are essential, but competitiveness should not be ignored. Student-athletes are the strength of the division—their overall educational experience must receive greater emphasis.

Feedback at the August 6 meeting of the Chancellor’s and Presidents Advisory Group (PAG) largely reiterated the preceding comments. The PAG gave special emphasis to a more explicit expectation for presidential leadership, the need for better education regarding the content of the philosophy statement, and the potential benefits of a marketing effort to emphasize the division’s unique, academically based model.

#### Recommendations for Further Consideration

- Consistent with the rationale described in White Paper No. 1, include in the philosophy statement a specific expectation for active presidential leadership related to the Division III athletics programs at the institutional, conference and national levels.
- Consider specific steps to educate governing boards regarding the division’s philosophy, related institutional commitments, and presidential expectations.
- Undertake a comprehensive educational effort related to the philosophy statement. There is lack of understanding for the tenets of the philosophy statement, beyond the prohibition on the awarding of athletics aid. Membership growth and diversity make it increasingly important for the membership to understand and commit to all tenets of the statement.
- Give the Division III philosophy statement more prominent emphasis in the Division III Manual.
- Initiate a comprehensive Division III marketing effort, using appropriate expertise, which will emphasize the division's holistic educational approach and the integration of athletics into the educational experience of the division’s student-athletes. The study and its recommendations should be research based.

- Create an identity for Division III as a conscious alternative to the sport-specialization culture, and as an accessible and fulfilling educational and athletics destination. Emphasize a fuller, more integrated academic experience as the primary goal and consideration in all divisional endeavors.