



A project of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
www.knightcommission.org

December 16, 2019

Sent Via Email

Dr. Mark Emmert
NCAA President

Dear Mark,

As you know, the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics has worked for three decades to design and advance reforms that strengthen the educational mission of college sports. The NCAA graduation rate report released in October provides welcome news of widespread educational improvement that has positively impacted the lives of tens of thousands of student-athletes. We applaud the NCAA for its longstanding efforts toward achieving these outcomes.

While we all celebrate that progress, it is clear that substantial challenges face NCAA member institutions, conferences, and college athletes in the highly commercial environment for Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) football and some NCAA Division I sports, particularly men's basketball. In light of these challenges, the Knight Commission is examining more far-reaching reforms that continue to prioritize student-athletes' education, health, safety and success in all aspects of the system's operation (e.g., structure, governance, staffing, revenue distribution, policies, athlete benefits).

Building on our previous work, the Commission intends to explore new models for alternative structures for Division I college sports, with a special focus on the impact of FBS football.

We are writing to request your assistance with one part of our review of FBS football. FBS football has a unique position under NCAA bylaws, and much of the public and even some sportswriters are largely unaware of it. As you know, it is the only sport for which the NCAA does not conduct a championship, though it is recognized by the NCAA for membership and revenue distribution purposes. This relationship began in an era when television rights for football were controlled by the NCAA, before the College Football Playoff (CFP) and its predecessor groups existed, and when postseason football revenues were a small fraction of their worth today.

One of the components of our review is to look at the NCAA's shared revenues, earned primarily through the Division I men's basketball tournament, to see how those revenues are distributed to Division I institutions. We especially want to understand how FBS football impacts the NCAA revenue distributions (e.g., consideration of FBS football in the calculations for grants-in-aid, sports sponsorship, Student Assistance Fund, and other distributions). By our preliminary and rough estimates, more than 60 percent of the NCAA distributions are impacted by FBS football factors, even though the NCAA does not receive any revenues from FBS football. We have specific data requests concerning these distributions that we can discuss.

While this data would enhance our examination of the current FBS football/NCAA Division I structure, we believe making this data transparent is also vital and valuable to public disclosure per se, particularly at a time when higher education is under pressure to be more transparent about its funding and outcomes.

Members of the Knight Commission are listed on the attached to identify the individuals involved in supporting this review. As you know, many of these leaders have had extensive involvement in NCAA governance and have first-hand knowledge of the challenges in the current environment.

We are glad to discuss our request in greater detail by phone or in-person with you. Or, if you would prefer, we would be happy to provide a short briefing to the Division I Board of Directors or the NCAA Board of Governors at your January meeting. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Carol Cartwright
Co-Chair



Arne Duncan
Co-Chair

Attachment

Cc: Eli Capilouto, chair, NCAA Division I Board of Directors
Michael Drake, chair, NCAA Board of Governors
Kevin Lennon
Donald Remy
Members of the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics



Knight Commission On Intercollegiate Athletics

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