



NCAA Division I Governance and Organizational/ Competitive Structure Survey

Executive Summary

Prepared for:
**KNIGHT COMMISSION ON
INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS**

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The Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics contracted with Shugoll Research to conduct a quantitative survey to understand perceptions and opinions on the current governance and organizational/competitive structure of the NCAA's Division I and evaluate potential changes to address perceived issues.



Specific research objectives include:

Research Objectives

1. Identify Interest in Division I Reform
2. Determine Satisfaction with Division I Governance Structure
3. Evaluate Selected Governance Issues
4. Determine Satisfaction with Division I Organizational/Competitive Structure
5. Evaluate Selected Organizational/Competitive Issues
6. Assess Current Division I Qualification Minimums
7. Assess Current Student-Athlete Health and Well-Being Benefits and Measures
8. Determine Agreement with Current Athletics Financial and Funding Sources and Spending
9. Analyze Views on Revenue Distribution
10. Assess Reaction to Selected Reform Concepts
11. Determine Reaction to Federation Concepts
12. Obtain Reactions to Specific Potential Changes

Online Quantitative Survey

Shugoll Research developed a 15-minute online survey that was sent to Division I campus leaders. Participants were identified via client lists, which included campus leaders from all NCAA Division I schools. In advance of the survey, a pre-notification email was sent to potential respondents asking for their participation.

The survey was sent via email with a unique link for each participant. Between June 18th and July 14th, 2020, a total of 362 participants completed the survey. This period is notable because it is during the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to cancellation of the 2020 men's and women's basketball and other spring championships and significant evaluation on whether to hold football and other fall sports in 2020.

Total (n=362)*: Data for the total respondent base are accurate within +/-5% at a 95% confidence level.

Presidents (n=69): Response rate of 20%.

Athletics Directors (ADs) (n=106): Response rate of 30%.

Conference Commissioners (n=21): Response rate of 66%.

Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR) (n=90): Response rate of 25%.

Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) (n=66): Response rate of 19%.

Student-Athlete (n=10): Response rate of 25%.

It is important to break out the results of this study into smaller subgroups, according to competitive classifications: Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) (n=136), with additional distinctions between the “Autonomy 5 (A5)” Conferences (n=63), Group of 5 (G5) (n=73), Conferences; Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) (n=117); and D-I schools with no football (D-I No Football) (n=109). Current issues and future reform may impact schools in these classifications differently. Further, it is critical to see if the views of Presidents, Athletics Directors and Commissioners, who are referred to in the report as key decision-makers, are similar or different. Given the limited number of respondents in these categories, small subgroup sizes are presented throughout the report. While these subgroup sizes are often too small to have a minimal statistical margin of error, the analysis presents these comparisons as general differences (or similarities) between these subgroups.

Respondents were screened to confirm that they:

Are

- A College/University President/Chancellor (referred to in report as a key decision-maker)
- An Athletics Director (key decision-maker)
- A Conference Commissioner (key decision-maker)
- A Faculty Athletics Representative
- A Senior Woman Administrator
- A Student-Athlete Leader

Represent an Institution/Conference that is Division I, Defined As

- Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) “Autonomy Five (A5)” Plus Notre Dame
- Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) “Group of Five (G5)” and FBS Independents
- Football Championship Subdivision (FCS)
- Division I with No Football

Overview of Findings

Potential drivers of Division I athletics reform include low satisfaction with current NCAA governance and organizational/competitive structure, perceived lack of common values across schools and resource disparities across schools.

1)

The majority of respondents are not satisfied with NCAA Division I governance. This is true for all division classifications (A5, G5, FCS, DI-No Football) and all types of key decision-makers (Presidents, Athletics Directors, Conference Commissioners). Respondents feel slightly better about the Division I organizational/competitive structure with some differences across classifications and decision-maker titles. Again, however, a minority of respondents are satisfied with NCAA Division I organizational/competitive structure.

2)

Most respondents do not feel Division I schools share common values about what intercollegiate athletics should be at an educational institution. This view is most commonly held by respondents at schools outside the A5. Presidents and Athletics Directors across all of Division I also do not feel schools in DI have common values. Nevertheless, respondents feel strongly that athletics at their institution is in alignment with the core mission of their institution.

3)

Respondents strongly agree that the current Division I structure has too much difference in resources across schools. This difference in resources should be a major driver of reform in Division I athletics. The varied level of financial resources and sources of revenues lead to the identification of different issues: G5 and DI-No Football schools feel there is an over-reliance on student fees and/or university funding for athletics at their institutions to make up for shortages in ticket sales, sponsorship dollars, donations and media revenues.

Overview of Findings

Members feel the time is right for reform including big changes and big solutions.

4)

Approximately-three quarters of respondents would like to see change in both governance and organizational/competitive structure. A similar number say the pandemic presents the perfect time to tackle these problems. And almost 8 in 10 agree that any reform should achieve “big solutions” rather than incremental changes. These views suggest, perhaps now more than at any other recent time, the mood is right for change and big change. It appears that the environment is right to act on this desire and implement reform, including some of the changes identified in this study that are supported by many campus leaders.

Respondents with perceived advantages, like the FBS in voting and representation, want to protect the power they have, while others are looking for more fairness and want to pursue changes that benefit them.

5)

There is a divide among the various D-I subdivisions regarding the current governance structure. FBS respondents overwhelmingly feel it is appropriate that their conferences have more voting power and representation in NCAA governance than non-FBS conferences, while non-FBS respondents disagree.

All subdivision classifications except the A5 are strongly in favor of including independent members on the NCAA Division I Board of Directors, similar to the change that occurred with the NCAA Board of Governors. The A5 are split on the idea, but not strongly opposed. When considering responses of key decision-makers across all subdivisions, a majority of Presidents, Athletics Directors, and Conference Commissioners support this idea.

Overview of Findings

Respondents are split along classification lines on their satisfaction with both the current College Football Playoff (CFP) revenue distribution and the NCAA revenue distribution formula.

6)

A5 schools have high overall satisfaction with both the current College Football Playoff revenue distribution and the current NCAA revenue distribution formula. G5, FCS and DI-No Football are dissatisfied with both. The majority of Presidents, Athletics Directors and Conference Commissioners across all classifications are dissatisfied with both. Three areas of specific inquiry about the revenue distribution formulas show areas of strong consensus among respondents of non-FBS schools and in some cases G5 schools agree. However, A5 schools disagree with their views on these items:

- The majority of respondents from non-A5 schools disagree that the retention of all CFP revenue by the FBS schools is appropriate;
- A majority of non-A5 respondents do not agree that the full absorption of FBS football national costs by the NCAA is appropriate; and
- Only FBS schools feel it is appropriate for FBS football grants-in-aid and other FBS football factors to count in the current NCAA revenue distribution formula.

There is significant agreement on some of the current issues, problems, and solutions in Division I finance.

7)

Agreement on Financial Problems

- Many respondents say their schools spend more money than they should to keep up with higher-resourced schools in football and basketball in terms of athlete benefits, scheduling, coaching salaries and number of non-coaching, but sports specific, personnel.
- FBS respondents agree that the number of non-coaching personnel devoted to football is too large.
- Respondents agree that the financial guarantees (either through ticket purchases or financial contributions) required by FBS schools or conferences to participate in bowl games should be reduced and/or eliminated.

Potential Solutions

- Respondents support the concept of “conference-level agreements for capping institutional operating budgets (including coaching salaries and sport-specific personnel) for specific sports.” Although Commissioners do not support this, Presidents and Athletics Directors do.
- Respondents support seeking an anti-trust exemption in order to reduce athletic costs.

Overview of Findings

There is general agreement on a variety of issues related to college athlete experiences; their treatment under NCAA rules; and the rules that outline levels of opportunity and financial aid for athletes.

8)

These issues include the following:

- Football and basketball college athletes should be treated like college athletes in all other sports in terms of academic eligibility rules, amateurism rules and benefits like long-term health coverage/expenses.
- There is general agreement that athletics financial aid levels and minimum number of sports that must be offered to meet Division I membership are about right.
- A significant number of respondents from non-A5 conferences agree that the current designation of sports as headcount or equivalency is appropriate. A5 respondents highly disagree.
- NCAA maximum scholarship allocations across sports are generally considered appropriate.
- Many believe sports seasons, in general, and men's and women's basketball seasons, specifically, are too long. Only respondents from DI-No Football disagree and are somewhat split on those questions. Interestingly, Conference Commissioners and Athletics Directors have higher levels of concern about the length of the men's and women's basketball seasons than Presidents.
- Most respondents feel that current healthcare benefits and medical treatment for athletes, particularly those in contact sports, is sufficient and does not need to be addressed. There is less confidence that long term healthcare benefits are sufficient. Nevertheless, there is overwhelming support in favor of a change in NCAA governance to have some board members selected to explicitly represent the health, safety and well-being of athletes.

Classifications agree on multiple leadership and governance issues and support various solutions to these challenges.

9)

These issues and solutions include the following:

- Fewer than half of the respondents in all classifications agree with the statement that “as a membership association, the National office is able to provide appropriate leadership.” The strongest concern about this statement was by A5 respondents with barely a quarter agreeing. Belief that as a membership association, the National office is able to provide appropriate leadership is higher for the respondents from other subdivisions, but still below 50%.
- Few believe the NCAA enforcement system works well. This includes all classifications and decision-maker titles.
- All classifications agree that Conference Commissioners have more influence in the NCAA governance system than Presidents. The only segment of respondents who do not to agree with this statement is Commissioners.
- There is support for a single point of leadership for Division I basketball with clear responsibilities, analogous to a Commissioner, across classifications. Note that Conference Commissioners do not support this while Presidents and Athletics Directors do.
- FBS respondents, including majorities from A5 and G5 schools also support a single point of leadership for FBS football with clear responsibilities, analogous to a Commissioner. Only FBS schools evaluated this option. Again, FBS Conference Commissioners are opposed to this.
- There is overwhelming support in favor of a change in NCAA governance to have some board members selected to explicitly represent the health, safety and well-being of athletes.

Overview of Findings

The survey presented two potential major governance and organizational changes. Each has some support. A key element of strong consensus for any future model is: “It is essential to keep all current Division I schools in the same men’s basketball tournament.” The current basketball format should be retained. Respondents also indicated interest in various federation-by-sport concepts, while at the same time preferring a unified multisport conference arrangement with favorable travel and rivalries. Reactions to the two models follow these summary comments about federation.

10)

One potential organizational/competitive reform is to permit federation by sport except in basketball. Respondents are generally supportive of this concept, although some current organizational factors appear to be contrary to this concept.

First, they believe that it is important for all sports at their institutions to compete in the same multi-sport conference where possible. Second, most feel that their multi-sport conference membership is a good fit with respect to travel and rivalries.

However, they generally support two important aspects of federation. One is permitting sports, other than men's and women's basketball, to form geographic federations outside their current multi-sport conferences in order to reduce costs. Another is to allow schools to be Division I in some sports and Division II or Division III in others, like the arrangement that currently exists in sports with a smaller number of programs like hockey and lacrosse. All classifications and decision-maker titles (with the exception of Conference Commissioners) support this latter federation concept.

A third concept is supported by all but those in the A5 and Conference Commissioners: reduce the influence of strength of schedule in championship selection and seeding in sports other than men’s and women’s basketball. This would make geographic affiliations, and the scheduling of non-league regional games more achievable, which would reduce travel costs.

Overview of Findings

11)

A major structural change that was presented for reaction was to create an entity separate from the NCAA to govern FBS football, since FBS football currently manages its postseason championship and accompanying revenues outside of the NCAA structure.

On this change, opinions break down over classification lines. This major structural change is supported by respondents from FCS schools and overwhelmingly by DI-No Football. However, among respondents from FBS schools, about twice as many A5 schools are unlikely to support this new entity as are likely, while G5 schools are more evenly split.

Further, FBS schools are less likely to consider this change fair and reasonable for their schools nor do they to see it as addressing some significant problems in the NCAA or saving money.

12)

Despite not having the majority of FBS support separation of FBS football from the NCAA, there are several things FBS respondents find appealing about an entity separate from the NCAA to govern and operate all aspects of FBS football. Most appealing (mentioned by almost 6 in 10 respondents from FBS schools) is that all other championships would remain in NCAA DI as now organized, each of the FBS football programs would align their governance and operations by moving to this new non-NCAA football-only entity or to the FCS and the new entity would fund operations through CFP revenues or fees.

What is most unappealing to FBS members is that the new entity would determine college eligibility requirements for FBS football players. Also unappealing to around a third of respondents is that the new entity would oversee all regulatory functions, including compliance and athlete safety programs and determine its own membership criteria.

Overview of Findings

13)

The final major structural change presented for feedback is to create a new NCAA division for the A5 in all sports, but to retain the common NCAA D-I tournament for men's and women's basketball.

A new NCAA division for the A5 in all sports has less support than the concept for a separate FBS football entity. Twice as many are unlikely to support this concept as are likely. It also has the inverse reaction than the separate FBS football entity: over 6 in 10 A5 schools support it but nearly 6 in 10 of all other DI classifications are opposed to it. Presidents, Athletics Directors and Conference Commissioners across all classifications collectively are more likely to oppose this model than support it.

Further, respondents from schools other than the A5 are less likely to consider the change fair and reasonable for their schools and don't see it as addressing significant problems or saving money.

14)

While non-A5 schools are opposed to the concept of a new A5 division, there are some things they find appealing. Most appealing is that all DI schools would continue to compete in the same men's and women's basketball tournaments. Almost 4 in 10 respondents find appealing that governance for the remaining DI members would be re-evaluated by members and that schools not now in the A5 may be able to join the new NCAA Division if they meet the membership criteria. Three things are most unappealing about this change:

- Current NCAA revenue distributions would not change and additive revenues from the new NCAA Division would be retained by its members.
- New Division championships could exist for sports other than basketball, which would not include schools outside the new division.
- The new Division would establish its own membership criteria and rules.