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## **College Sports at a Crossroads**

### ***Survey of NCAA Division I campus leaders reveals deep concerns over direction of Division I sports, financial stability and the impact of the House v. NCAA settlement***

A national survey of NCAA Division I university presidents, athletics directors and other campus athletics leaders highlights serious concerns about the future of Division I college sports, with more than 75 percent believing the recent *House v. NCAA* settlement terms will have a negative impact. The findings, released today by the [Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics](#) and the [Elon University Poll](#), paint a picture of a system under severe strain with the majority of leaders expressing negative views about the direction of Division I.

This new survey is particularly timely because federal lawmakers are debating legislation that would create sweeping changes for Division I athletics. The survey shows that Division I campus leaders, by large margins, support federal action to resolve issues like standards for NIL compensation and the classification of college athletes as employees.

“It’s a new era in college sports,” said Amy Privette Perko, Knight Commission CEO, “And the candid views of Division I leaders suggest this new era could be a troubling one that could harm women’s and collegiate Olympic sports. These findings should help inform Congress as it works to build a new model for Division I sports.”

The Elon Poll/Knight Commission survey found that campus leaders are deeply concerned about the financial sustainability of their athletics programs, current college athlete transfer rules and unprecedented changes they fear will harm women’s and collegiate Olympic sports. At the same time, they expressed a near-unanimous and

unwavering commitment to the academic mission of college sports, with resounding support for maintaining academic standards and prioritizing graduation.

The survey captured the views of 376 university presidents and chancellors, athletics directors, senior woman administrators and faculty athletics representatives, in early August 2025. Each of these campus positions are legislatively mandated leadership roles within the existing NCAA Division I governing structure. The 26% response rate provides a statistically representative sample of these Division I leaders views within a +/-4.4% margin of error.

“This survey presents a clear picture of a defining moment for Division I college sports,” said Len Elmore, Knight Commission co-chair. “Navigating the path forward will require difficult decisions about finances, governance and the core identity of college athletics.”

**Access full survey results, including an executive summary, charts and data for all questions at [bit.ly/D1leaderspoll](https://bit.ly/D1leaderspoll).**

This Elon Poll/Knight Commission survey was conducted after the *House* settlement became effective on July 1, 2025. That settlement allows schools, for the first time, to provide NIL compensation and other new payments, commonly referenced as “revenue-share,” directly to college athletes. The survey’s key findings include the following:

**1. Division I leaders express a negative outlook about the future of college sports and have significant financial concerns**

- A majority (**62%**) believe Division I is headed in a negative direction, with **80%** of university presidents and chancellors expressing this view.
- Nearly 8 in 10 leaders (**79%**) are concerned about their athletics programs’ future reliance on institutional funds and student fees to balance budgets
- More than three in five campus leaders (**62%**) doubt that Division I can remain a single entity within the NCAA.

Knight Commission co-chair Pam Bernard said, “The leaders share widespread agreement that the current framework of Division I faces an unprecedented crisis of stability and sustainability.”

**2. Nearly unanimous support for maintaining academic mission and standards**

Division I leaders overwhelmingly affirmed the importance of the educational component of college athletics, with strong support for athletes being enrolled full-time (**98%**) and graduating (**99%**), and teams having to meet academic standards for postseason competition (**95%**).

**3. Overwhelming opposition to current athlete transfer rules and strong support for maintaining the current four-year eligibility rule**

- More than 8 in 10 campus leaders (**86%**) say the transfer portal is having a negative effect on Division I sports and leaders are similarly unified in opposing

current rules **(84%)** that allow athletes to transfer as often as they choose with immediate eligibility at their new school.

- Nearly 8 in 10 **(77%)** believe it is important to limit college athletes to four full seasons of eligibility.

“As a pollster, when I see agreement consistently in the 70 to 90 percent range across high-stakes issues, I see a signal of shared urgency and clarity among Division I leaders that is notably rare in complex and evolving policy areas like college athletics,” said Jason Husser, director of Elon University Poll.

4. **Leaders foresee a negative impact of the *House* settlement overall on Division I but views vary on the future impact on athletes’ experiences in specific sports.**

- More than three-quarters **(76%)** believe the settlement’s impact on Division I as a whole will be negative, a view held by **88%** of college presidents and chancellors.
- A majority **(60%)** believe the settlement will have a **positive** impact on the experience of FBS football athletes, with less positive impact for men’s basketball **(48% positive)** and women’s basketball **(38% positive)**. Meantime, leaders expect **negative** impacts for athletes in all other men’s sports **(80% negative)** and women’s sports **(78% negative)**.
- As a subgroup, athletics directors were more optimistic about the impact of the House settlement on FBS football athletes **(75% positive)**, men’s basketball athletes **(63% positive)** and women’s basketball **(50% positive)**.

5. **Widespread support for collegiate Olympic sports and new funding mechanisms**

- Nearly all Division I leaders **(93%)** believe it is important for universities to offer non-revenue sports like gymnastics, swimming and track & field, and that these programs are vital to Team USA’s Olympic success **(94%)**.
- Nearly three-quarters **(73%)** favor using federal funds to help finance collegiate Olympic sports and scholarships, and even more **(82%)** support the use of revenues from a federal tax on sports gambling operators to support them.

6. **Gender equity concerns and future threats.**

The survey exposed a fundamental challenge in applying Title IX to new athlete NIL or “revenue-share” payments from the institution:

- **Nearly half (47%) of Division I leaders** say these new institutional payments should be “based on how much money an athlete’s sport generates or the athlete’s marketability,” while **31%** say institutional payments “should be included in the total amount of institutional financial assistance (e.g., athletics scholarships) and distributed equitably to female and male athletes,” and **22%** are unsure. As a subgroup, athletics directors were much more decisive, with **78%** favoring the market-based approach.

- A majority of leaders (55%) predict that Division I female athletes will be worse off under the new rules. This concern was especially strong among university presidents (64%) and faculty athletics representatives (69%).

## 7. Significant support for federal legislation to regulate college sports

- Division I leaders overwhelmingly support national standards or laws to regulate athlete NIL compensation (86%), to prevent college athletes from being classified as employees (78%) and to allow national rules to supersede conflicting state laws (77%).
- Nearly 7 in 10 (69%) support national laws that would allow limits on how much each institution can spend on specific sports or budgets.

Division I leaders also strongly support different competition structures for sports other than basketball to allow more regional scheduling. And a slight majority of both FBS and non-FBS leaders support creating a new governing entity for Power 4 football teams separate from the NCAA. A majority of FBS leaders (58%) also support having a “single executive or commissioner to provide unified leadership for the sport, not just for its national championship, the College Football Playoff.”

This survey follows a [national public opinion survey](#) on college sports conducted by the Knight Commission and Elon University Poll in July 2025.

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### Survey Methodology

This survey was developed by the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics and the Elon University Poll. It was fielded by the Elon University Poll as a Qualtrics, web-based, self-administered survey between July 29 and August 22, 2025. Those invited via email to take the survey included representatives at 364 NCAA Division I colleges and universities. There were 376 respondents, including 61 presidents or chancellors, 94 athletics directors, 79 senior woman administrators and 142 faculty athletics representatives. The respondents included 51 individuals from Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) Power 4/autonomy conferences, 83 from the FBS Group of Six conferences and FBS Independents, 128 from the Football Championship Subdivision and 114 from Division I basketball centric (no football) schools. The overall margin of error for this poll is +/- 4.4%, with larger margins of error for subgroups. Access the full report, charts, survey topline and methodology at: [bit.ly/D1leaderspoll](https://bit.ly/D1leaderspoll).

### About

[The Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics](#), founded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation in 1989, is an independent group that leads transformational change to prioritize college athletes’ education, health, safety, and success. [knightcommission.org](https://knightcommission.org)

[The Elon University Poll](#) was established in 2000 as a public policy research initiative. The Elon University Poll conducts North Carolina and national surveys on important issues, sharing the results with media, citizens and public officials to facilitate informed public policy making through the better understanding of citizens’ opinions and attitudes. The poll is fully funded by Elon University and is a charter member of the Transparency Initiative, a program created by the [American Association for Public Opinion Research](#). [www.elon.edu/elonpoll](https://www.elon.edu/elonpoll).