

# NCAA Constitution Committee Survey

## Executive Summary of Findings

### September 2021

#### **Purpose**

To inform the work of the Constitution Committee, an online survey was sent to college presidents, faculty athletics representatives, athletics administrators, conference commissioners, coaches association executive directors and student-athlete leaders. The survey asked respondents to identify current NCAA constitutional elements that should carry into the future and solicited suggestions for modernization and improvement.

#### **Methods**

Two survey instruments were designed by NCAA research staff in collaboration with the Constitution Committee. One survey was designed for student-athlete leaders at the campus, conference, and national level, while the other was designed for campus, conference office and coaches association leaders. Respondents spent 10-30 minutes to complete the survey via phone, tablet or computer through QuestionPro, an online survey platform.

Campus and conference administrators were emailed directly and asked to complete the survey, using email addresses listed in the NCAA membership directory. Student-athlete leaders at the national level were emailed directly, while conference student-athlete advisory committee liaisons were made aware of the survey and asked to forward the survey link to student-athlete leaders at the conference and campus level. The survey was active for 10 days, opening Aug. 23 and closing Sept. 1, 2021.

#### **Response Rates**

The surveys were completed by 3,492 campus, conference and coaches association administrators or executives, and 1,362 student-athlete leaders. Athletics directors and conference commissioners had the highest response rates, with over 75% participation Association-wide. Half of all faculty athletics representatives and 41% of presidents and chancellors at NCAA member schools completed the survey.

#### **Findings**

##### *Principles Central to the NCAA*

Across the membership, a substantial majority (over three-quarters) within each role by division agreed that the following principles were central to the future of the NCAA as a governing body: conducting national championships, the primacy of the academic experience in policy and decision making, sport-specific rules for competition and participation, standards for allocating national revenue, standards for college athlete eligibility, and standards for college athlete health and safety.

Over 90% of student-athlete leaders within each division agreed that standards for inclusive and equitable environments were central to the future of the NCAA. Such standards also received over 70% agreement within each administrative role and division, with the exception of Division II and Division III conference commissioners at 57% and 64% respectively. Survey participants were able to suggest additional principles the committee could consider during redrafting. Suggestions included amateurism, diversity and inclusion, gender equity, student-athlete development and student-athlete mental well-being. In addition, over 75% of student-athlete



respondents endorsed each of the subprinciples of the current constitutional principle of student-athlete well-being: overall educational experience (2.2.1); cultural diversity and gender equity (2.2.2); health and safety (2.2.3); student-athlete/coach relationship (2.2.4); fairness, openness and honesty (2.2.5); and student-athlete involvement (2.2.6).

#### *Setting Standard Minimum Requirements*

Across divisions, administrators and student-athlete leaders were most likely to endorse setting standard minimum requirements at the national level for health and safety, inclusion and equity and sport-specific rules of play. Standards for the allocation of athletics department resources were most likely to be endorsed at the campus level. Preferences were mixed regarding whether standards should be set at the national, divisional, conference or campus level for the other principles of conduct outlined in the survey: athletics aid and institutional benefits, benefits and compensation from noninstitutional sources, championship opportunities, initial and collegiate academic eligibility, divisional membership requirements; playing and practice seasons, and recruiting.

#### *Accountability for Compliance Expectations and Enforcement*

Division I and Division II were more likely to recommend accountability be set at the national level for championships, health and safety, inclusion and equity, and sport-specific rules of play, while Division III respondents were more mixed between divisional and national accountability.

Over 60% of athletics health care administrators indicated a preference for national accountability for health and safety, while a majority of athletics diversity and inclusion designees indicated a preference for national accountability for inclusion and equity. Accountability (compliance/enforcement) for the allocation of athletics department resources was most likely to be endorsed at the campus level across all three divisions. Among the other principles of conduct, preferences for at what level accountability should be set varied and were often unique to division.

#### *Assessing the Need To Change the Current Divisional Structure*

Approximately one-third of Division II and Division III leaders surveyed agreed that the current divisional structure needs to change. This was higher in Division I, with a slight majority of respondents endorsing such a change. However, when breaking out responses by those in Division I autonomy and nonautonomy conferences, over two-thirds of autonomy conference administrators supported such a change to the structure as compared with approximately 45% of nonautonomy conference administrators in Division I.

Those who agreed that the current divisional structure was in need of change received an open-ended prompt asking them to describe their vision. Comments included calls to increase the number of divisions (often calling for an expansion of Division I, or in some cases Division III); break the autonomy conferences out of Division I and permit self-governance; reconsider Division I subdivisions by extracting FBS football from NCAA oversight; and restructure divisional membership, taking into account geography, campus enrollment or resource level.

#### *Presidential Oversight*

Administrators also were asked whether presidents and chancellors should retain primary oversight of intercollegiate athletics in the future. While over 80% of presidents in each division endorsed this concept, half of athletics directors and conference commissioners supported this



model, and about a third of administrators in the other roles surveyed across the three divisions felt similarly. Those who left comments about their vision for a new structure suggested increasing the role of athletics directors and conference commissioners in national oversight, and many also suggested that NCAA governing bodies should include broader representation across a range of roles in athletics (e.g., compliance, coaches, conference personnel, etc.).

### *Responses to Open-Ended Questions*

The administrator survey included 11 open-ended questions and the student-athlete leader survey included five. While nearly 3,500 administrators took the survey, each open-ended question typically received responses from 15%-25% of administrators; 1,975 participants (57%) responded to at least one open-ended question. Among student-athlete leaders, open-ended questions typically received responses from 20%-30% of participants; 658 participants (48%) responded to at least one open-ended question. The comments were grouped thematically for committee consideration. However, because of the response rates cited above, the themes identified may not be representative of the membership as a whole.

### *Overarching Themes in Open-Ended Responses*

Administrators in Division II and Division III voiced concern that they will be heavily impacted by the work of the Constitution Committee but will have little voice in the process. Many who expressed contentment with their current divisional model were wary of a constitutional overhaul. Among those who do want change, some noted that they would like to see greater equity in terms of divisional representation in decision-making and more revenue shared with Divisions II and III.

The current principles outlined in the NCAA constitution have strong support across the Association. Comments often focused on requests, or suggestions regarding how to uphold and enforce these principles. Health and safety, access to championships, competitive equity and a focus on the student-athlete collegiate experience are high on the list of priorities and non-negotiables moving forward.

Numerous respondents — both administrators and student-athlete leaders — indicated that principles of diversity, inclusion and equity need to be central to a constitutional redrafting. However, there was a smaller number of administrators who felt strongly that the NCAA should “stay in its lane” as an athletics association, focusing on rules of competition and conducting national championships—not responding to or addressing matters perceived as social, cultural or political issues.

Student-athlete leaders called for an increased focus on the holistic student-athlete experience and student-athlete mental health. Many advocated for additional avenues to include the student-athlete voice in decision making. Student-athlete leaders also wove calls for equity into their responses across the survey, including both attention to gender equity and equitable opportunity and recognition for athletes regardless of division or sport.

A more detailed slide deck summarizing the qualitative and quantitative findings from both surveys can be found online [here](#) at NCAA.org.

