

NCAA DIVISION I PRESIDENTIAL FORUM



CHARTING THE COURSE:
*Aligning student-athletes' personal goals
and professional aspirations
before, during and beyond
their collegiate experience*

**Final Report
April 2018**



INTRODUCTION

The collegiate model of athletics is based on the premise that participation in college sports enriches the entire postsecondary educational experience for student-athletes. Athletics participation is an integral component of that experience rather than an ancillary or extracurricular endeavor. And the benefits of participation – the teamwork, the self-discipline, the camaraderie, the engagement with community, the collaboration with persons of varied backgrounds to achieve a common goal – serve student-athletes not only during their time in competition, but also as lasting lessons well after they have earned their diplomas.

Accordingly, it is incumbent upon the NCAA and all those who work in intercollegiate athletics to assure the optimal experience for student-athletes, from before they enroll, through their college years, to life beyond graduation.

Charting the Course is an unprecedented and holistic examination intended to advance that optimal state of student-athlete development and preparation for life. This presidentially-led effort launched in January 2017 identifies pathways to best position student-athletes for long-term success, and it ensures that the NCAA membership and external audiences clearly understand the beneficial role intercollegiate athletics plays in student development, and why athletics is appropriately aligned within higher education.

The initiative will help inform values-based decisions to protect and enhance the collegiate model, and to help member institutions provide an experience that affords all student-athletes a pathway to opportunity by ensuring:

- That student-athletes have the opportunity to be fully integrated into all aspects of the collegiate experience, including co-curricular, social and civic engagement.
- That all student-athletes, including those who aspire to compete professionally, are equipped with realistic expectations as to professional athletics careers and are afforded the career development and planning necessary to inform decisions, including post-professional career options and the opportunity to return to college to complete a degree.
- That all student-athletes are offered experiences conducted in a safe environment that fosters physical and mental health and well-being.
- That schools, employers, parents and, most importantly, student-athletes, understand and appreciate the educational value and high-impact learning gained through participating in sports and take advantage of the opportunity to translate skills developed through athletics into attributes that shape their lives.

These principles encompass the breadth of the student-athlete experience by:

- Focusing on creating more realistic expectations for students before and during their college years;
- Demonstrating how athletics is a part of the educational experience for all; and
- Emphasizing how the enormously valuable experiences as a student-athlete translate to the workforce and contributing to society.

Charting the Course is a presidential perspective that identifies the ideal circumstances to optimize a student-athlete's experience, during the *entirety* of that experience. If participation in intercollegiate athletics is to produce the benefits the NCAA purports, then establishing proper parameters to ensure those desired outcomes is essential.

Why the Presidential Forum?

Issues in Division I intercollegiate athletics often are addressed within just one component of the student-athlete experience, such as recruiting, the length of seasons, the number of contests, eligibility standards, etc. Charting the Course affords a broader overview of student-athlete development throughout the lifespan of the collegiate experience. The Presidential Forum is positioned to provide the tools necessary for institutions to nurture student-athletes throughout the lifespan of their collegiate experience, thereby positively affecting them for life.

The Board of Directors is the ultimate oversight authority within the Division I governance structure, and the Forum is the Board's advisory arm. The Forum is responsible for considering broad, strategic issues and innovative approaches to support the Board's agenda. Charting the Course fits appropriately within those parameters, and the project benefits from the Forum's composition that represents all 32 Division I conferences.

Presidents are responsible for Division I athletics. The Board sets the agenda, while the Forum offers broad-based counsel. Together, presidents will drive home this transformative initiative. The Forum is composed of members who have years of experience in higher education, and they know firsthand the benefits – and challenges – that intercollegiate athletics within a higher education construct present.

Board of Directors Strategic Areas of Emphasis *Foundational Goals (Draft)*

- Oversee development of policies and legislation to improve student-athlete academic success and provide them with a well-rounded and safe educational and athletics experience that supports their overall well-being – from pre-college participation and recruitment to graduation and beyond – and prepare them for a successful transition from college into lifelong productive citizenship.
- Oversee development of policies and legislation to sustain the Division I collegiate model in light of the current and future fiscal climate affecting intercollegiate athletics and higher education.
- Identify and examine challenges and opportunities affecting the Division I collegiate model, and develop strategies to effectively manage outcomes and directions to enhance student-athlete experiences and well-being.

The timing of the Charting the Course effort is fortuitous, as it will help the Board of Directors finalize the division's five-year strategic areas of emphasis going forward.

FRAMEWORK AND GUIDING THEMES

Charting the Course leverages the already proven premise that the intercollegiate athletics experience adds unique educational value for student-athletes. The attributes inherent in athletics participation – the work ethic, leadership, collaboration/teamwork, time management, self-discipline, engagement within the campus and surrounding community, partnering with teammates from diverse backgrounds and cultures – offer as much of a high-impact “classroom” for learning as other aspects of education such as lab work, study-abroad programs, internships, and practicum experiences with faculty members or local businesses/organizations. Student-athletes learn valuable life lessons as part of their intercollegiate athletics experience, and NCAA research shows that those lessons position student-athletes for success in life well beyond their college years.

The continuum of the student-athlete experience – from college recruitment through the college years to the post-college environment – is such that (1) expectations and habits developed along the way can positively or negatively affect student-athletes’ well-being and skill development at all stages of their experience; (2) engagement in intercollegiate athletics has the potential of adding significant value to student-athlete well-being and developing leadership qualities when done properly; and (3) the student-athlete experience at its core is one that builds on students’ experiences generally, regardless of their “elite status” in athletics at any point along the continuum.

With the value of intercollegiate athletics already well documented, and with the idea that identifying and ensuring the optimal state by which all student-athletes benefit from that value is a primary goal, the Forum agreed to pursue desired outcomes and address related challenges regarding the intercollegiate athletics experience in three areas:

- The pre-college years, particularly as it relates to recruitment and college choice;
- The in-college years, focusing on student-athlete development and preparation for life after graduation; and
- The post-college years, facilitating success in the student-athlete’s chosen pursuits and preparing them as contributors to society.

Subgroups were appointed to examine each area in depth, one to address the pre-college years and another to study the in-college and post-college segments. In the early stages of the project, the presidents heard presentations from current and former student-athletes who related their own experiences and suggestions for enhancement.

Forum members also examined ample data regarding a number of relevant areas, including factors that affect college choice; athletics time demands during college; factors affecting the decision to transfer; student-athlete satisfaction with their college experience; how the youth sports model (particularly sport specialization at an early age) affects student preparation for college; expectations for playing professional sports (both from prospective student-athletes and parents/guardians); and factors affecting student-athlete mental health and well-being, among others.

The presidents agreed to conduct the initiative in two phases. The first identifies overarching presidential principles that support the optimal outcomes a young student

would experience upon entering college and before leaving school to prepare for post-college life. The second overlays those principles onto the Board's strategic areas of emphasis for 2018-2023 and charges the Division I governance structure to make legislation and policy decisions accordingly.

The Forum agreed to focus on presidential principles as the most appropriate and useful contribution to this effort, leaving the operational components to the practitioners in the Division I governance structure to implement. Such an approach has been effective previously for the Board of Directors, as with the recent football recruiting package.

To help inform that charge, the subgroups were asked to develop principles relevant to their respective areas that align with the overarching principles. In addition, the Forum sought existing practices from institutions and conferences that support these principles and have already proven to be effective. The goal is to provide the membership with an opportunity to highlight their own effective programming, catalog the responses, and share the best ideas with campus presidents and administrators via an online database. Faculty athletics representatives have been asked to assist with this inventory.

Taken together, the Division I governance structure will have the necessary guidance to achieve desired outcomes the Board of Directors identifies in the 2018-2023 strategic areas of emphasis.

Guiding Themes

While identifying the optimal college experience and implementing initiatives to ensure desired outcomes might be considered an ambitious – perhaps even daunting – pursuit, the Presidential Forum used the following statement to guide its work:

NCAA Division I member institutions should (1) accurately and honestly advise and inform prospective student-athletes during recruitment and college selection; (2) afford enrolled student-athletes the encouragement and flexibility to excel in their desired educational pursuits; (3) ensure that student-athletes' participation in athletics enhances their physical, mental and social well-being; and (4) provide the framework that enables student-athletes to learn, develop and apply the skill sets necessary to contribute as productive citizens post-college.

Such a goal is not merely aspirational – it is the basic premise under which all people in intercollegiate athletics operate. Given that foundational standard, the Forum's discussions from the outset focused on "how to get there."

The pathway can be divided into two simple checkpoints:

1. Ensure a college experience – from recruitment to graduation and beyond – that during each step of the way takes the student-athlete's well-being into account.
2. Enable student-athletes to learn, develop and apply skill sets that facilitate a successful transition from college into lifelong productive citizenship – regardless of whether they spend part of their post-collegiate career as a professional athlete.

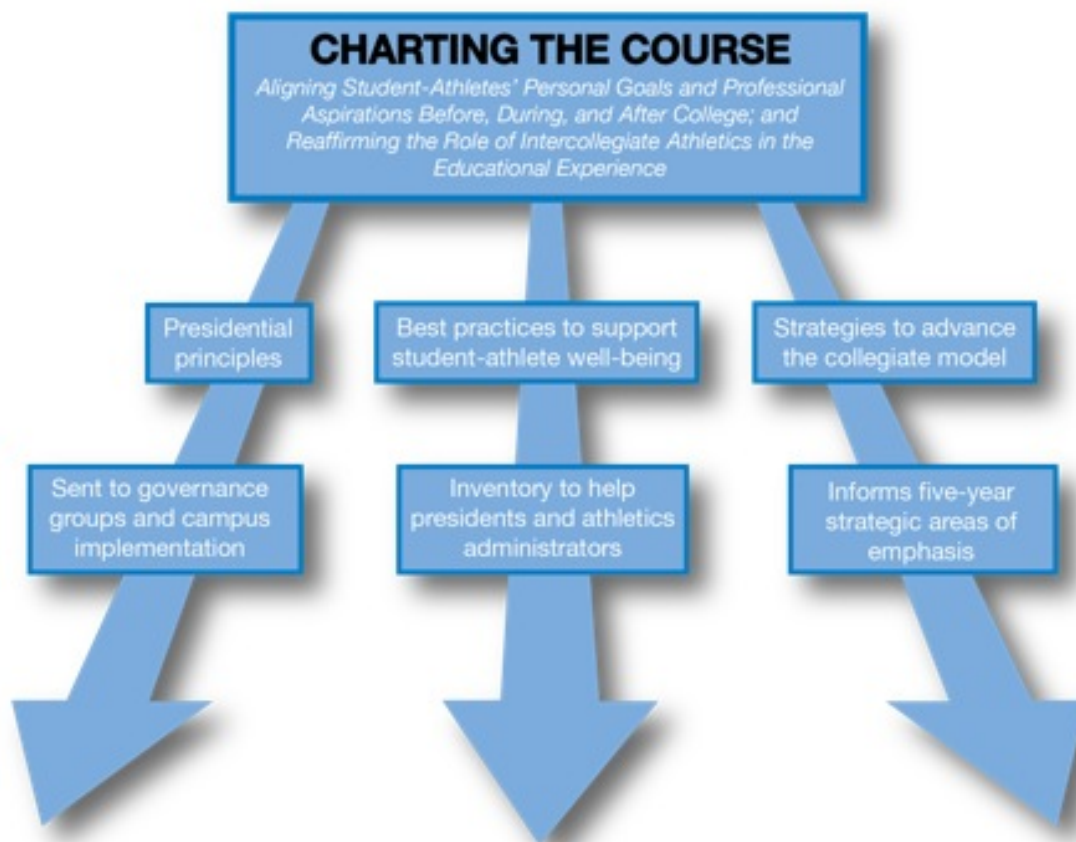
The underlying question when considering these is, of course, how being a *student-athlete* uniquely affects the outcome. In other words, how does the current culture of intercollegiate athletics in Division I add to, or detract from, a student-athlete's ability to navigate these paths?

The Forum was enthusiastic about continuing its work within this three-step approach, knowing that the subgroups would be able to identify principles that support the optimal outcome for student-athletes in each area by using the two checkpoints as a north star and then examining how the culture and regulations associated with intercollegiate athletics factor into the equation in order to develop recommendations.

The "Three-Step" Approach

- Always focus on student-athlete well-being
- Develop skill sets to ensure a successful transition
- Does athletics add to, or detract from, optimal outcomes?

While the overall task was no less challenging, the Forum agreed this three-step approach would expedite the work and produce more realistic results.



‘PRESIDENTIAL PRINCIPLES’

Forum members applied their three-step approach to develop overarching principles to essentially chart the course for a successful student-athlete experience. These principles reflect how the athletics experience *should* unfold in an ideal world. While presidents aren’t naïve to think any attempt at an optimal state – whether in athletics or any other aspect of higher education – isn’t fraught with challenges, they have been strategic in the Charting the Course initiative to develop principles that are lofty enough to be demanding but reasonable enough to achieve with persistence and a commitment to integrity.

The idea behind developing these principles was to set a high bar, and then charge the subgroups to create their own goals that not only align with the overarching principles but that can be addressed and implemented realistically in the trenches through legislation and policy. In other words, Phase One of Charting the Course is literally to chart the course. Phase Two is to implement strategies and tactics to guide decision-making within governance, at the conference level and on individual campuses that help the membership successfully navigate that course.

With that as a backdrop, following are the principles the Presidential Forum developed to chart the optimal course for a successful and rewarding student-athlete experience. These principles are not designed to become the initiatives in and of themselves; rather, they are developed to help the governance structure recommend policies and procedures – through legislation if appropriate – to achieve desired outcomes.

- Advance recruiting models and practices that better reflect the value of higher education and support student well-being. Student-athletes should be surrounded by a network of support during high school and while on campus to ensure they receive the most from the educational experience. This includes devoting special attention to a prospective student-athlete’s parents/caregivers to best prepare the young person for college selection and subsequent phases of life choices. The same network available for the general student should also be accessible to the student-athlete. In other words, experiences should define an individual’s ability to be a good future citizen, not whether the individual is an athlete.
- Advance through legislation, policy and campus practice the premise that student-athletes must be provided with a well-rounded educational experience. This should include experiential-learning opportunities such as internships, study-abroad programs, or perhaps practicum experiences with faculty members or local businesses/organizations should student-athletes so desire, that enhance their overall well-being, from recruitment to graduation and beyond, and prepare them for a successful transition from college to lifelong productive citizenship.
- Promote a healthy coach-athlete relationship that enhances the student-athlete’s well-being and skill development at all stages of the student continuum. Coaches play a significant role at all levels in shaping expectations and must be educated and held accountable as such. Coaches typically are the first representative from the campus community to introduce the student and family to higher education. They often serve

as the most influential person in a student's life while on campus, and they frequently help shape a student's post-college aspirations.

- Reinforce the need for the health and safety initiatives to gain traction on campuses so student-athletes can be better supported throughout their experience, including after graduation.
- Advocate for the long-term benefits of participation in a diverse set of athletics and academic experiences before entering college, acknowledging the potential negative effects of sport specialization at an early age.
- Seek new and promote established best practices for advancing student-athlete well-being and skill development for all Division I members to position student-athletes as leaders and role models who exhibit characteristics and attributes the general student population will want to emulate.

These goals are indeed lofty, but they are not “pie in the sky,” nor were they developed hastily or in a vacuum. On the contrary, the Presidential Forum relied on student-athlete testimony and reams of research to develop principles that logically dictate a successful student-athlete experience.

Reports from student-athletes about their experiences were critical. NCAA Division I Student-Athlete Advisory Committee members spoke candidly to the Forum about their college recruitment, their expectations for what participation in athletics would be like, whether those expectations were met, and what could be done to improve the outcomes.

Among research the Forum considered is a study Gallup conducted in conjunction with Purdue University in 2014 that focuses on the framework necessary within higher education to position students as meaningful contributors to society. For students in general, that framework often includes a mentor figure, typically a professor who inspires a passion within the student to follow a particular curriculum or career field. The Presidential Forum noted that athletics is uniquely structured to add to that mentor/mentee component through student-athlete interaction with head coaches, assistant coaches and athletics administrators, in addition to the influential relationships student-athletes experience with their professors.

The NCAA also has ample research regarding student-athlete experiences. Data from the GOALS (current student-athletes) and SCORE (student-athletes 10 years removed from their college experience) studies are particularly enlightening in this regard, as they indicate a high level of satisfaction during the college experience and acknowledge how participation in athletics enhanced student-athletes' lives afterward. The SCORE study in particular reveals that student-athletes are more likely to gain full-time employment than their non-athlete counterparts, and many former athletes report that the skills and values they learned through athletics did in fact help them acquire their current job.

In short, Division I student-athletes obtain valuable skills that serve them long after their collegiate athletics experiences have ended. These skills are highly valued by employers in a range of industries and sectors, and Division I should continue to provide support for student-athletes in translating their experiences as athletes to prospective employers.

The Presidential Forum's Charting the Course initiative aims to pursue long-term approaches to ensuring those outcomes.

Cultural/Societal Factors and Challenges

To further emphasize that the overarching principles were not envisioned through rose-colored glasses, the Forum from the beginning acknowledged that Charting the Course – both plotting that course and navigating it – would be subject to any number of cultural/societal factors that affect all of college sports, some of which college presidents, administrators and coaches can influence and others that may be beyond their control.

For example:

- What student-athletes from different backgrounds experience before they come to college will vary significantly. Over time, the Division I membership has adopted dozens of policies and procedures to help ensure a level playing field within the competitive aspect – from eligibility standards, recruiting practices and amateurism status to playing and practice seasons and access to championships. While student-athlete well-being has always factored significantly into these competitive areas, perhaps less attention has been devoted to ensuring that prospective student-athletes know what to expect during their college experience and are adequately prepared to succeed in their chosen career fields after they leave the institution, regardless of their backgrounds before entering college.
- Many prospective student-athletes and their families/guardians have unrealistic aspirations of receiving athletics scholarships and becoming a professional athlete. The Division I philosophy encourages athletics achievement at the highest level. For many sports in fact, Division I competition offers the most high-profile stage in intercollegiate athletics. The spotlight shines brightest in football and men's basketball, and while student-athletes in those and other sports are afforded many positive opportunities, the glare often skews expectations. It is fine – even appropriate – to encourage the dream. Being a professional athlete is just as meaningful as being a professional in some other career field. However, institutions must do all they can to ensure that student-athletes are adequately prepared with options should those dreams not be realized.
- Division I institutions offer unique and plentiful opportunities, and student-athletes should be encouraged to experience as many of those opportunities as they desire. However, sports at the Division I level – particularly for those who seek to play professionally – can become “all consuming” when it comes to the time student-athletes devote to their sport. NCAA data from current and former student-athletes indicate a consistent increase in many sports (especially male sports) in time spent on athletically related activities. Despite existing legislation to restrict those time demands, data show that some student-athletes exceed limits, either of their own choice or because they are encouraged to do so. The potential “over-prioritization” on athletics can impede the student-athlete's ability to experience all the campus has to offer, including social and civic engagement activities.
- Third parties – some with the student's best interests in mind and some not – will influence the student's experience at all stages in the continuum. While the NCAA cannot fully regulate or even reasonably monitor all of these interactions, it is imperative that student-athletes receive the proper counsel from institutions during their recruitment and their college experience that sets a realistic stage for their acclimation into life after college.

Forum members are aware of how athletics – particularly in select sports – faces the tug and pull between the will to win and the desire to win with integrity. The principles presidents developed support the latter, though they fully acknowledge the pressure of the former to negatively influence those principles.

However, such conflict should not, and cannot, block or derail establishing high-minded goals and aspirations. Charting the Course plots the path to success – it is up to those who oversee athletics, especially presidents, to ensure the course is navigated properly.

Success in this regard will require institutions, conferences and the NCAA as a whole to ensure that policies and practices align with core values, and that members have the courage to make changes locally and nationally when appropriate. Such persistent commitment is necessary to produce the positive and transformative experiences for student-athletes that every person in athletics desires.



PRINCIPLES FROM THE SUBGROUPS

With the overarching principles established, the subgroups went to work to develop their own principles relevant to their respective areas that both align with the overarching principles and provide ground-level guidance for groups in the governance structure to apply them accordingly.

Pre-College Subgroup

➤ **Early Recruitment**

- Interactions with prospective student-athletes before the junior year (early recruiting) should be primarily focused on values-based messaging that is not specific to an institution.
- Prospective student-athletes should have unlimited access to tools and resources that provide complete, accurate and transparent information supporting their college search and selection process.
- Verbal offers of athletics aid must include a “good-faith estimate” of the total cost of attendance and should not place undue pressure on prospective student-athletes to accept.
- Prospective student-athletes should understand the low probability of playing professionally when choosing a college. As such, academic factors (e.g., choice of major, career placement, study abroad and internship opportunities, etc.) should be prioritized during the college search and selection process.

In-College and Post-College Subgroup (well-rounded educational experience; reinforce health and safety)

➤ **Well-Rounded Education Experience (Study Abroad, Internships and Other High-Impact Experiential Opportunities)**

- Division I student-athletes should have access to available high-impact educational opportunities and experiences (e.g., internships, study abroad, research, career development, mentoring) that enhance overall well-being and prepare student-athletes for a successful transition from college into productive citizenship while completing degree requirements in a normalized timeframe.
 - Presidents and directors of athletics should oversee the development of campus policies that promote study-abroad and internship opportunities, which should be shared with coaches.
 - Financial aid agreements should include references to study-abroad programs, internships and other opportunity-rich experiences such as an extended practicum with a faculty member.
 - Athletics departments should work with faculty members, campus study-abroad offices and intern placement offices to develop opportunities that align with student-athlete skills and interests.

- Institutions should work to develop opportunity-rich, nontraditional career development experiences for student-athletes unable to participate in full-term programs (e.g., summer/vacation period study-abroad programs, integrate career development opportunities during travel for away from home competition), including those student-athletes likely to leave prior to degree completion.
- Conferences should discuss whether a conference policy related to these opportunities should be developed.
- NCAA team scholarship limits/replacements should be examined to determine if adjustments need to be made to best align with recent NCAA legislative changes to encourage access to institutional study-abroad and internship opportunities (e.g., five-year clock extension and progress-toward-degree rule modifications).
- Consider developing a national scorecard/recognition program for schools/teams that offer student-athletes high-impact educational opportunities.
- The Division I Council, through its Student-Athlete Experience Committee, should routinely request and review data on student-athlete engagement in high-impact educational opportunities.
- Opportunities for student-athlete engagement in high-impact experiential opportunities should be considered within broader time management discussions and planning.

➤ **Health and Safety**

- Division I intercollegiate athletics should promote the physical, mental and social well-being of all Division I student-athletes and prioritize the implementation of health and safety initiatives and best practices (e.g., NCAA Sport Science Institute resources, life after sport).
 - Institutions should develop health and safety implementation plans to address at a minimum, concussion management, mental health and cardiac care issues.
 - The health care administrator should meet periodically with the director of athletics and faculty athletics representative to provide assessments of existing health and safety implementation plan and ensure student-athlete access to available services.
 - The health care administrator should be introduced to all coaches, athletics administrators and student-athletes annually.
 - Athletics departments should evaluate support services provided to help student-athletes with mental health issues.
 - Concussion management plans should be evaluated annually.
 - All members of the coaching staff should be required to receive appropriate training and review the strategic areas of emphasis.
 - Student-athletes should be provided with relevant components of the school's health and safety implementation plan, including insurance coverage.