



A New Playing Field in Intercollegiate Athletics

Intercollegiate athletics is uniquely American and a part of our shared cultural heritage. In addition, college sports are behind only the GI Bill and the Pell Grant program in providing broad access to a college education. These attributes, and the potential for athletics priorities and academic goals to come in conflict, make college sports among the most publicly scrutinized programs in higher education.

Today, the pace of change and the range of possibilities for the future of college sports are staggering. There are multiple interrelated and evolving challenges, including name, image, and likeness (NIL); antitrust concerns; student-athlete mental well-being and academic success; and conference realignments and program reductions. Here we present several trends and proactive measures leaders can take to stabilize and strengthen their athletics program in an uncertain environment.

Program value will come under increased scrutiny:

NCAA Division I is a highly diverse group of 350 schools, 32 conferences, and three subsections — Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), Football Championship Subdivision (FCS), and non-football-playing members. These differences are magnified as conference realignment occurs, and many institutions will be forced to evaluate and defend their program's value as illustrated in figure 1.

Indirect Benefits of Athletics



Figure 1. Nonfinancial impacts of intercollegiate athletics

- Reinforce messaging about the positive impacts of intercollegiate athletics on the institution, including enrollment, experience, and engagement.
- Communicate athletics contributions to the institution's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals.

Costs will continue to rise, as will downward pressure on revenue:

The median annual expenses for Division 1 FBS schools per program have increased **78% in 10 years**, from \$42.4 million in 2009 to \$75.5 million in 2019.

- Reevaluate the **budgetary model**. Consider how athletics impacts the financial health of the entire institution and collaborate on prioritizing and aligning future investments.
- Assess whether and how to align the business model of athletics to existing resources. Explore **new strategic partnerships**, joint ventures, and other commercial opportunities to maintain competitive programs and manage costs.

Regulatory and governance uncertainties will persist:

Different states are already examining NIL statutes, the NCAA Transformation Committee will bring changes for all three divisions, and Congress will continue to consider potential action.

- Create more substantial alignment between institutional leadership and the athletics department.
- Engage university leaders in establishing guidance for boundaries and expectations.

Together with institutional leadership aligned and guided by the collective mission to provide a high-quality education to all students, athletic programs can overcome these uncertainties and continue to enrich our shared cultural heritage.



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