

## **Division III Compliance Corner**

The information in this article is intended to serve as a “Best Practices” guide for your compliance program. This issue of the compliance corner written by *Dr. Travis Feezell, Athletics Director, Macalester College*

### **A MODEL DIVISION III COMPLIANCE PROGRAM**

There is the highly held misconception that rules compliance and legislative rigor are somehow less emphasized at Division III institutions. Some argue that the Division I and II rule books are thicker and that the compliance issues are more complex and more consistently overwhelming at these schools. This in turn argues for large staffs and singular positions whose sole purpose is to address these thorny compliance issues. The stakes, many proclaim, are much higher at the Division I level and therefore vigilant compliance programs are a necessity.

Division III compliance programs are also a necessity, perhaps less complex and perhaps driven by different issues, but certainly no less meaningful and important to the overall welfare of student-athlete participants and the integrity of the games in which they compete. Moreover, successful Division III athletics programs have at core compliance programs which integrate within the athletics department and within the overall fabric of the institution. For some this seems shaped by circumstance; singular compliance positions in departments are few and often the compliance oversight falls to a coach or an administrator with multiple tasks. For others, this integration is a product of a principled approach to compliance that attempts to gather the collective energy of coaches, administrators, and others across many departments on campus. It is this principled approach that stands out as a model Division III compliance program and is based on the two distinct pillars described below.

#### ***PRINCIPLE #1 – Culture, not bureaucracy***

Model Division III compliance programs create a culture of integrity that revolves around the spirit and intent of the legislation. It is a culture that speaks to an integrated student-athlete experience and recognizes the unique characteristics of the institution. Coaches know and understand the rules and believe strongly in that legislation as a way to provide meaningful and spirited athletics activities. Administrators within an athletics department “administrate” the rules as a means to protect the integrity of the games themselves and shape the visible presentation of the institution. Finally, others on campus, from the registrar to the president, from student affairs to admissions, from chemistry to classics, recognize these rules as the appropriate path to create high quality activities for the students on campus.

Culture, though, is not bureaucracy. It is not a plethora of forms and processes. It is not multi-layered where one must continually confront obstacles to shape athletics on campus nor is it procedural in the sense that barrier after barrier must be overcome until students can engage in athletics experiences. Rather, culture is about shared intention and shared responsibility. It is not a single person or staff that we leave to negotiate rules, but rather all of us that daily engage with and shape the compliance culture.

#### ***PRINCIPLE #2 – Education, not reaction***

In creating a meaningful compliance culture, one must think about the education of all those involved on campus. Moreover, education has as its aim preventative action; if compliance programs are continually reactive, that is, responding often to a compliance crisis, then clearly culture is not in place and one would work to change this. How does culture get created? How should compliance education proceed? The model Division III compliance program recognizes that it is not just coaches that need education, but students, faculty, staff, parents, recruits, alumni, and others that fall within this educational endeavor.

Compliance education takes two forms in the model Division III program. On the one hand, education comes in a formal way. Rules seminars, annual testing, educational panels ... all of these are important and viable means towards creating the culture. Yet the best Division III programs capitalize on the intimacy of small, cohesive departments and recognize that the best compliance culture is created out of informal situations. It is the conversation with a student-athlete in the hallway before practice explaining why there is a traditional and a non-traditional season. It is the explanation to a parent or faculty member explaining the contest limitations for sports in Division III versus those in Division I. It is the idle "water-cooler" chat among coaches after just having read about a compliance issue at another institution and how that might be prevented. These informal situations have great power in compliance education and go far in creating the ideal culture of compliance at a Division III institution.

Finally, culture and education are without doubt intertwined, but they are also dynamic and continually changing. Students graduate, coaches move on, and alumni connection to the institution ebbs and flows. The model Division III compliance programs recognize this and continue to adapt. They are constantly in the process of learning others' best practices and consistently work to refine current processes to maintain the right compliance culture. A model Division III program is never in one place for too long!