



By book or by beaker?



Division III pilot program hopes to reveal what mix of education and testing deters drug use

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No matter what Division III decides after completing a two-year pilot drug-education and testing program, one outcome already seems certain: Member institutions probably can count on help from the NCAA in battling more than just drugs that enhance athletic performance.

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In addition to approving the pilot program beginning in fall 2007, the Division III Presidents Council made \$325,000 available immediately to provide member schools with more resources to combat alcohol, tobacco and other drug use — and administrators think that's probably just the beginning of a sustained attack.

"I'm pretty confident, now that we're already ramping up our efforts on the educational side, that those educational efforts will continue to be enhanced," said Dan Dutcher, NCAA Division III vice president.

That's not to minimize the importance of the pilot program itself, which is being designed to help Division III learn whether education alone can deter drug use by student-athletes — or whether testing is needed, too.

But the Council's recent action makes clear there is as at least as much interest in battling campus-wide abuse of alcohol and other substances through education as there is in addressing athletics-centered concerns about preserving competitive equity and student-athlete well-being through testing.

"There's not just a concern about performance-enhancing drug use and abuse, but substance use and abuse in general," Dutcher said. "Many people have told us that alcohol use and abuse is, in their mind, at least as significant if not of greater significance on campus than any other drug use. We can't underestimate the need to try to address substance abuse — and not just abuse of performance-enhancing drugs or even street drugs."

As a result, Division III institutions are being offered expanded access to highly regarded NCAA educational programs that have existed for years, and schools also eventually may receive assistance through sources such as the Strategic Initiatives Grant Program to explore other educational approaches.

That significant commitment is easy to overlook in the shadow of the more groundbreaking half

of the Council's recent actions: Division III will conduct drug testing for the first time outside of championships as part of the voluntary two-year pilot program involving about 100 institutions.

Pairing education and testing

Following expressions of interest in the pilot program from about 145 institutions, those schools have been asked to decide by December 6 whether they actually are able and willing to be included as participants.

All of the institutions selected will be required to implement a model education program targeting student-athletes. Many, though not all, of the schools also will experience random selection of student-athletes for drug testing sometime during the academic year.

The purpose of the pilot is to measure, through assessment before the program begins and again at the end, whether education — with or without testing — can reduce substance use.

"We really want to look at the results to help us determine to what extent education, testing and the combination can move the needle," Dutcher said. "That's where the research component will be critical. We're not just testing to deter, or educating to deter — we're educating and testing to try to determine how those initiatives can help affect student-athlete behavior."

Experience in the NCAA's two other divisions suggests that education is more effective accompanied by testing than without, says Mary Wilfert, NCAA associate director of education outreach and a staff liaison to the NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports, which recommended a year ago that Division III conduct a pilot testing program that did not specifically include an educational component.

"We see education as part of a comprehensive approach that also includes having a written policy in place to address the issues a school needs to address and — for performance-enhancing drugs — testing," she said. "Education has a benefit in and of itself, but it also supports the other two legs."

However, the pilot program represents the first effort in any division to measure specifically how education and testing interact to deter substance use.

"We've had an NCAA education program since the 1970s, but how that plays out on campus never has been measured," Wilfert said. "To be able to say that, with education alone we got this level of deterrence, and then when we couple education with testing we got this level — I don't have confidence in saying that."

Presidents Council members cited support for combining testing and education by the Division III Student-Athlete Advisory Committee as a reason for approving the pilot effort, which will run through the 2007-08 and 2008-09 academic years.

Heather Mathis, a recently graduated soccer student-athlete at Maryville College (Tennessee) who represents SAAC on the Division III Management Council, said student-athletes were concerned that the proposed pilot initially addressed only testing, without education.

"Our consensus was, drug testing is OK, but what's the point in testing if student-athletes aren't going to be educated?" she said.

However, SAAC members also made clear that testing should be a part of the pilot program.

