

DEVELOPMENT OF THE KNIGHT FOUNDATION COMMISSION ON
INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS AND ITS IMPACT ON COLLEGE SPORTS:
1989-2001

By

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This study was an analysis of the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics and the impact it had in the regulation of collegiate sports reform from 1989-2001 when the commission was active. The Knight Commission was funded exclusively by the Knight Foundation, an independent group of the Knight-Ridder Inc. newspaper chain, which makes charitable donations to higher education programs and community programs in the 26 cities where a Knight-Ridder newspaper is published. In particular, the Knight Foundation has made a strong commitment to improving higher education journalism programs worldwide.

The researcher interviewed six of the 22 Knight Commission members who served on the commission throughout its entirety from 1989-2001. The six members included Creed C. Black, former president of the Knight Foundation and member of the Knight Foundation Board of Trustees; Dr. William Friday, president emeritus of the University

of North Carolina; Dr. Thomas K. Hearn, president of Wake Forest University in North Carolina; C. Thomas McMillen, former Maryland congressman and former professional basketball player; Richard Schulz, former NCAA executive director and former executive director of the U.S. Olympic Committee; and Dr. Charles E. Young, president of the University of Florida.

The six commission members were chosen because they served on the Knight Commission throughout its entirety. Black and Friday provided the researcher with contact information for eight members who met that criteria. The researcher was able to contact four of those members, along with Black and Friday, to conduct either a personal or phone interview. Further background came from researching the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics Collection at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill Library System.

The Knight Commission was comprised primarily of university presidents and presidents of public and private corporations who were concerned about the overemphasis of athletics when compared to the academic goals of an institution. The commission first convened in the fall of 1989 and held a series of six hearings with key figures in intercollegiate athletics to determine the main problems facing college sports.

Based primarily on those hearings, the commission developed 20 suggestions for reforming intercollegiate athletics in its first report in March of 1991. The commission also issued follow-up reports in 1992 and 1993. Among those 20 suggestions, 10 were adopted in some form by the NCAA, including the top priority of placing university presidents in control of the NCAA in 1996. The commission reconvened in 2000 to reexamine the problems facing intercollegiate athletics and issued a final report in 2001.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Skepticism has traditionally been associated with reform movements in intercollegiate athletics. *The Wall Street Journal* said “Blue-ribbons panels ... are routinely ignored” (Hunt, p. A21). In *Games Colleges Play: Scandal and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics*, author John Thelin questioned the likelihood of any organization being able to bring about meaningful, permanent change in college sports:

What we find is that perennial confidence in blue-ribbon commission reports has often elicited a groundswell of immediate publicity and discussion. However . . . the diversity . . . of American higher education . . . tend to derail any attempts at implementing lasting policy changes. (Thelin, 1996, preface, p. viii)

Thelin’s 1996 book described the four largest intercollegiate athletic reform movements of the 20th century: the third report of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 1929; the Presidents’ Report for the American Council on Education in 1952; George Hanford’s 1974 study for the American Council on Education; and the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, which issued three reports from 1991-93, then issued a final report in 2001 prior to its disbandment.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is generally viewed as initiating the reform movement in U.S. intercollegiate athletics. The Carnegie Foundation group issued four reports pertaining to higher education from 1923-31. More than 100 U.S. universities were studied for the third and fourth reports. Chairman Henry S.

Pritchett issued this ominous warning in the preface of the third report, “American College Athletics,” in July of 1929 (Savage, 1929):

The paid coach, the gate receipts, the special training tables, the costly sweaters and extensive journeys in special Pullman cars, the recruiting from the high school, the demoralizing publicity showered on the players, the devotion of an undue proportion of time to training, the devices for putting a desirable athlete, but a weak scholar, across the hurdles of the examinations . . . ought to stop and the intercollege and intramural sports be brought back to a stage in which they can be enjoyed by large numbers of students . . . college sports have been developed from games played by boys for pleasure into systematic professionalized athletic contests for the glory, and, too often, for the financial profit of the college. (p.xxi)

Almost 75 years later near the beginning of the 21st century, the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics was sounding that same warning about the priorities of athletics being skewed when compared to the academic goals of a university and that universities were compromising their academic values in lieu of fielding successful athletic programs. Only this time, costly sweaters and Pullman cars had been replaced by million-dollar revenue-sharing and Nike shoes.

The guiding principle behind this study was to measure the impact a journalism-related charitable organization such as the Knight Foundation had on reforming intercollegiate athletics. The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics issued four reports from 1991-2001 dealing with reform measures for intercollegiate athletics. The Knight Foundation Commission’s reform package consisted of a series of recommendations compiled by members based on the major issues confronting university athletic departments in the 1980s and 1990s:

- 1) academic abuse, centering on the poor graduation rates and academic performance of student-athletes;
- 2) financial expenses, the expenses related to intercollegiate athletics and how those escalating costs, particularly since the 1980s, had continually led expenses to outpace revenues at many university athletic departments;

- 3) the influence of corporate sponsorships and “rights fees” from NCAA or conference revenue-sharing on universities, creating the perception that these exorbitant figures had “professionalized” intercollegiate athletics.

Academic Abuse

Academic abuse primarily included the academic status and progress of student-athletes. The Knight Commission was concerned that some student-athletes were entering institutions not prepared for the academic demands of a university and were not committed to working toward a degree. Here are some examples of academic transgressions since 1980:

- A 1980s survey found that of 106 of the more than 300 universities competing at the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s highest level, I-A, 48 had graduation rates under 30 percent in men’s basketball, while 19 other universities had graduation rates of under 30 percent in football. (Report of the Knight Foundation Commission, June 2001)
- A 1991, 90-minute documentary “Sports for Sale,” funded by the Knight Foundation Commission and produced by Public Affairs Television pioneer Bill Moyers, found a 30 percent graduation rate for Division I football and basketball players in the late-1980s and early-1990s. The documentary also revealed 25 percent of high school players at a Nike basketball camp in the late-1980s read below a sixth-grade level and only 16 percent of basketball players at the University of Louisville from 1981-1990 graduated. (Knight, 1996w, subseries 3.1, folder 162)
- University of Minnesota men’s basketball coach Clem Haskins was forced to resign in 1999 following a school investigation when a former tutor for the team said she had written 400 papers for 20 players from 1993-1998. One assistant professor at the school complained to school administrators when he suspected some of those papers written by the players were not authentic because he said one of those papers was the best he had read in his 40 years at the university. (Sperber, 2000)
- A 1999 NCAA study revealed the overall graduation rate within a six-year period for Division I-A male athletes to be 58 percent, however, those rates fell to 51 percent for football players and 41 percent for basketball players. (Bowen & Shulman, 2001)
- Another NCAA study released in September 2002, tracked graduation rates in men’s basketball compared to the overall male graduation rates at institutions from 1983-95. Among the findings were that the University of Louisville (17 percent graduation rate for men’s basketball players) and the University of Oklahoma (15

percent graduation rate for men's basketball players) had graduation rates for men's basketball players at least 25 percent lower than those of all male students on their campus. (Wieberg, October 18, 2002)

- At the end of Ohio State University's 2000 football season, 23 players would have been ineligible to play in a national championship bowl game after January 1 because their grade point averages fell below the NCAA-minimum of 2.00 required to remain eligible. One of those players had a 0.00 grade point average that season. (Glasser, 2002a)
- According to a May 2002 study in *The Des Moines Register* published in the *USA Today*, 45 of the 69 men's basketball teams from the NCAA's top six conferences had graduation rates of less than 50 percent among all their players from 1993-2000. The University of Florida, University of Oklahoma and University of Tennessee, which won three of the five Associated Press college football national championships from 1996-2001, had median graduation rates of less than 50 percent. (Witosky, 2002)
- According to a 2002 NCAA study, Brigham Young University, Georgia Tech and the University of Michigan all had graduation rates for football players at least 30 percent less than all male students on each campus from 1992-1995.

Financial Expenses

The Knight Commission was concerned that a win-at-all-costs mentality had forced institutions to make increasingly larger financial commitments to its athletic departments. Those financial commitments sometimes left athletic departments in a precarious situation when attempting to balance revenues against expenses. Here are some examples of those financial commitments since 1980:

- An August 3, 2001, *USA Today* story on college coaching salaries found 22 head football coaches and 17 men's head basketball coaches making salaries of more than \$1 million a year. The highest paid coaches on that 2001 list were the University of Florida's Steve Spurrier in football at \$2.1 million a year and the University of Louisville's Rick Pitino in basketball at \$2.2 million. (Wieberg, 2001a)
- After Texas A&M reached the Big 12 Championship Game in 1998, head coach R.C. Slocum signed a seven-year contract extension for \$7 million, raising his base salary from \$185,000 to \$300,000 and being given a \$200,000 annual raise. University of Tennessee head football coach Phil Fulmer signed a six-year contract that paid him \$1 million a year after the Volunteers won the national championship in 1998. (Vitale & Weiss, 2000)

Some of those coaches reach the magic mark by hitting incentives, such as money for winning a conference championship, qualifying for a bowl game or graduating a certain percentage of players. Salaries, along with a push to expand stadiums and upgrade other facilities, feed into growing concerns about an escalating athletics arms race that a majority of schools can't afford. (Wieberg, 2001a, p. 1A)

University athletic department officials argued that in order to remain competitive, they must continually upgrade their facilities to attract the most promising student-athletes.

- In the 1990s, many athletic departments either upgraded their facilities or built new ones, often moving the expenses, including the debt-servicing, off their books and onto university ledgers. As always, athletic directors and coaches pressured presidents and administrators to approve the construction--whether the institution could afford the costs or not. (Sperber, 2000, p. 228)
- Since 1998, of the \$635 million allocated for Ohio State University's capital budget, \$316 was used for building new athletic facilities. If that figure is broken down per student, Ohio State spent just over \$350,000 per student-athlete on improving its athletic facilities as compared to spending just over \$6,600 per student on non-athletic facilities. (Glasser, 2002b)
- When the University of Buffalo joined the Mid-American Conference (MAC) in the early 1990s, it was forced to spend several million dollars to upgrade its facilities in order to meet minimum NCAA Division I-A standards. The school also had to increase its athletic budget from approximately \$3 million (when it was a Division III school) to more than \$10 million when it moved up to Division I-A, "and school officials acknowledge that the sea of red ink will expand during the first decade of the twenty-first century" (Sperber, 2000, p. 66).
- Virginia Tech athletic director Jim Weaver said, "If you are not upgrading your facilities, you are going backward." A former University of Nebraska athletic official had a similar belief: "When we won the national (football) championship at Nebraska in 1994, what we did instantly was continue to expand. That's when we started the project to build skyboxes and expand the stadium and continue to improve facilities" (Sperber, 2000, p. 228).

"Rights Fees" and Corporate Sponsorships

That trend in upgrading or building new university athletic facilities came partly from the enormous amounts of money institutions received from "rights fees"--money paid to the NCAA and athletic conferences by television networks for the "rights" to

broadcast certain sporting events. That money was eventually dispersed to member schools through “revenue-sharing” plans where each school would receive a certain percentage of a total “rights” fee.

Over the last decade, the commercialization of college sports has burgeoned. Vastly larger television deals and shoe contracts have been signed, and more and more space in stadiums and arenas has been sold to advertisers. In too many respects, big-time college sports today more closely resemble the commercialized model appropriate to professional sports than they do the academic model. (Report of the Knight Foundation Commission, June 2001, p. 19)

Here are some examples of the “rights fees” since 1980:

- The NCAA will receive \$6.2 billion from CBS television for broadcasting rights to the NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament from 2002-2013. The NCAA generated more than \$275 million in revenue from the 2000 NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament, including \$17.1 million from ticket sales, and distributed nearly \$150 million to Division I colleges. (Vitale & Weiss, 2000) That “rights fees” from the NCAA Tournament has steadily increased since the mid-1980s, starting at \$32 million a year from CBS in the mid-1980s, increasing to more than \$60 million in 1986, more than \$1 billion in 1989 and \$1.7 billion in 1994 prior to the most recent contract of \$6.2 billion starting in 2002. (Sperber, 2000)
- The Southeastern Conference (SEC) split a conference-record \$95.7 million among its 12 member schools during the 2001-2002 academic year. That total was \$17 million more than its previous record and represented a continuing increase in “rights fees” paid to SEC schools. Those “rights fees” were \$4.1 million in 1980, \$16.3 million in 1990 and \$45.5 million in 1996. The SEC “rights fees” included \$40.7 million for TV football contracts; \$17.2 million in bowl game payouts; \$12 million from the SEC championship football game; \$12 million from the NCAA basketball tournament; and \$10.3 million from TV basketball contracts. (Hyams, 2002)

Sponsorships have also become an important part in the college athletic scene.

Athletic apparel manufacturer Nike is responsible for many of those sponsorships.

The sports marketing trend was to hook up “near exclusive” sponsorship deals with entire universities -- as Nike had struck with the University of Miami in 1989...The University of Southern California’s football, basketball, tennis, volleyball, and track-and-field teams, for instance, would be prominently clad in Nike gear. The money would first pass through university administration and then go to the team coaches. Over half of the NCAA championship basketball teams of the past ten years had worn Nikes, and more than sixty big-time colleges were “Nike schools”--

this, in most cases, because their coaches were Nike coaches. (Katz, 1994, pp. 25, 243)

- From 1980-1988, universities which had sponsorships with Nike to outfit their teams won four of eight NCAA Tournaments in men's basketball during that period. During one season in that 1980-1988 period, 23 of 64 men's basketball teams which qualified for the NCAA tournament had contracts to wear Nike products. (Katz, 1994)

Focus of the Study

This study examined the impact the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics played in reforming intercollegiate athletics from 1989-2001. Those dates were selected as the time period the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics remained active by either holding hearings or issuing reports.

The primary questions this research is intended to answer are as follows:

- 1) How did a journalism-based charitable foundation dedicated to protecting the First Amendment rights of free speech decide to become involved in collegiate athletic reform?
- 2) How did the commission report its findings to the public, and did the commission use its connections to a media conglomerate such as Knight-Ridder Inc. to sway public opinion --through the media--about its findings?
- 3) How were the actions and recommendations of the Knight Commission viewed by the academic and athletic community, including administrators, faculty, coaches, and athletic directors?
- 4) What has been the NCAA's response to the Knight Commission's work?
- 5) How do members of the Knight Commission evaluate the success of the group's work.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

To acquire further background on the Knight Commission, six commission members were interviewed. Other background on the commission was done by researching the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics Collection at the University of North Carolina to locate testimony from the five 1990 commission hearings used to form the basis for the first Knight Commission report in 1991. The Knight Foundation Commission Collection included a “clips file” of media coverage of the commission, which was also analyzed for this research.

The researcher interviewed six of the 22 individuals who served on the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics during its entirety from 1989-2001. In all, 30 members served on the Knight Commission – two members resigned following the 1991 report and eight members were added for the commission’s fourth and final report in 2001.

The following Knight Commission members were interviewed:

- Creed C. Black, Knight Foundation president, 1988-98;
- Dr. William Friday, president emeritus, University of North Carolina, Knight Commission co-chairman;
- Dr. Thomas K. Hearn, president, Wake Forest University;
- C. Thomas McMillen, former U.S. congressman (D-Maryland);
- Richard Schultz, NCAA executive director, 1987-93; and
- Dr. Charles E. Young, former chancellor, UCLA, and president of the University of Florida.

In order to receive the most accurate perspective on the Knight Commission's accomplishments, it was necessary to interview individuals who served on the commission throughout its entirety. Black and Friday provided the researcher with contact information for eight members who met that criteria. The researcher was able to contact four of those members, along with Black and Friday, to conduct either a personal or phone interview. Further background came from researching the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics Collection at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill Library System.

These individuals were asked the five research questions through either personal interviews or telephone interviews from May 1-June 30, 2002. Their Institutional Review Board approval responses are included in the Appendix. The researcher also made two trips to the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill campus to use the Manuscripts Department of the Southern Historical Collection of the UNC-Chapel Hill The Academic Libraries, where the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics Collection is housed. The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics Collection includes 16,200 items. The collection is broken into series:

- Series 1 -- Knight Commission Reports: Report Drafts, Final Reports, Responses and Requests for Reports
- Series 2 -- Meeting Materials: Transcripts of Proceedings (Closed until January 1, 2004); Meeting Notes and Summaries, Masters Briefing Book, which was a clip file of Knight Foundation Commission media coverage.
- Series 3 -- Chair, Commissioner and General Files: Files from Knight Foundation Commission member Creed Black and from staff associate director Maureen Devlin, along with Commissioner Files from several Knight members and two General Files.
- Series 4 -- Monthly Correspondence and Bills.
- Series 5 -- Video and Audio Tapes.

A separate section contained additions made after November 1994. The researcher was able to read minutes from the five meetings from January-July of 1990 used to generate the first report of the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, *Keeping Faith With The Student-Athlete: A New Model For Intercollegiate Athletics*.

Research Limitations

The research from this study was limited for the following reasons:

- 1) Only six of the 22 Knight Commission members who served on the commission during its entirety were interviewed. Commission members Creed C. Black and Dr. William Friday provided the researcher with contact information for eight members. The researcher was able to reach six of the eight members, including Black and Friday. The criteria of interviewing members who served on the commission throughout its entirety was used because the researcher thought those members could provide a more detailed perspective on the overall accomplishments of the commission. The six individuals interviewed were generally supportive of the work of the Knight Commission.
- 2) The accuracy of the information collected from the interviews was predicated on members recollecting events that in some cases had occurred one decade earlier. The Knight Commission was formed in the fall of 1989, and this research began in the winter of 2002. Several members interviewed said it was difficult to recall exact details of how certain commission events transpired. "I'll scratch my head and try to help," one member said. "Please remember that we're talking about stuff that happened 10-12 years ago."
- 3) While the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics Collection at the University of North Carolina contained approximately 16,200 items, those items were not all in chronological order, making it difficult to track year-by-year information, particularly financial information. For example, while there was a folder for Monthly Correspondence and Bills, complete information was not available for every year and was not arranged chronologically. Another obstacle to obtaining accurate information on the commission was that the transcripts of the commission's executive sessions, which were only open to commission members and where important decisions were sometimes made on the wording and agenda in the reports, will not be available to the public until January 1, 2004.

CHAPTER 3 HISTORY OF KNIGHT FOUNDATION AND COMMISSION ON INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics was a division of the larger John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Understanding how the Knight Commission fits into that context is important.

Brothers John S. and James L. Knight formed the Knight Foundation in 1950 as a private foundation independent of their family publishing operation. The Knights' father, Charles Landon Knight, purchased the family's first newspaper, the *Akron Beacon-Journal*, in 1903. John S. Knight inherited that paper upon his father's death in 1933, providing the start for the Knight Newspapers chain.

Knight Newspapers purchased *The Miami Herald* in 1937, and James L. Knight moved to Miami to run the paper. Over the next three decades, Knight Newspapers acquired newspapers including the *Detroit Free Press*, *Charlotte (N.C.) Observer* and *Tallahassee Democrat*.

Knight Newspapers became a public corporation by offering public stock in 1969. In 1974, Knight Newspapers Inc. merged with Ridder Publications, Inc. to form the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain. Knight-Ridder incorporated in Ohio in 1974 and reincorporated in Florida in 1976, where it opened its headquarters that same year and remained until moving to the Silicon Valley region of San Jose, California, in 1998. By 2002, the Knight-Ridder Inc. chain was comprised of 32 daily newspapers, as well as the Real Cities Internet network of 54 regional web sites (www.knightfdn.org).

The Knight Foundation was formed from the original Knight Memorial Education Fund, created in 1940 in memory of Charles Landon Knight, who was instrumental in helping Akron, Ohio-area college students with college funding. The fund's assets of just under \$10,000 were transferred to the Knight Foundation when the organization was formed in December of 1950.

Almost from the beginning, however, the Foundation made small grants to educational, cultural and social service institutions--mostly in Akron--and, on a very limited basis, for journalism-related courses. For the first 10 years, the Foundation's assets came from contributions from the *Akron Beacon Journal* and *The Miami Herald* and personal gifts by John S. and James L. Knight. Other Knight newspapers began to contribute small amounts in the early 1960s--a move that led to a limited number of grants to cities from which the contributions came. Newspaper contributions stopped in 1965 with the Foundation's first major infusion of assets--a bequest of 180,000 shares of Knight Newspapers stock from the Knights' mother, Clara I. Knight. . . . A turning point came in 1972 when the board of trustees authorized the sale of Clara Knight's stock in a secondary offering by Knight Newspapers. The sale raised \$21,343,500, increased the Foundation's assets to more than \$24 million and initiated an expanded grant program focused on the growing number of cities where the Knights published newspapers. Journalism, especially the education of journalists, became a matter of more pronounced funding interest. (Reports of the Knight Foundation Commission, 1991-1993, p. 37)

The Knight Foundation opened its first office in Akron in 1975, the same year John S. Knight bequeathed the remainder of his estate to the organization upon his death. John S. Knight passed away on June 16, 1981, and almost five years later, on May 5, 1986, the Knight Foundation received a transfer of funds from the bulk of John S. Knight's estate--\$428.1 million. James L. Knight passed away in February of 1991, also bequeathing the Knight Foundation \$200 million from his estate (Reports of the Knight Foundation Commission, 1991-1993).

Creed C. Black, a former publisher of the Knight-Ridder newspaper, the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, who later served as Knight Foundation president from 1988-98 and is now a member of the Knight Foundation Board of Trustees, said the organization began

focusing more of its charitable resources towards liberal arts colleges beginning in the late 1980s (C. Black, personal communication, June 3, 2002). The Knight Foundation concentrated its efforts in these primary areas: journalism, nonprofit organizations, arts and culture, education, children/social welfare, citizenship, community development, homelessness, and literacy. That philanthropic initiative was headlined by the foundation's Knight Community Initiatives Program, whose primary mission was to award charitable contributions to organizations in the 26 cities where a Knight-Ridder-owned newspaper was published when James L. Knight passed away in 1991. The Knight Foundation had just begun to change its mission to community-based fundraising prior to James L. Knight's death. The largest contribution from the Knight Community Initiatives Program was awarded to Dade County, home of The *Miami Herald*, when the Knight Foundation created a \$10 million fund to aid the county in the cleanup following Hurricane Andrew in 1992 (Reports of the Knight Foundation Commission, 1991-1993).

Journalism proved an especially fertile area for initiatives as educational needs and free-press and First Amendment issues created opportunities for funding with impact. . . . Journalism, especially the education of journalists, became a matter of more pronounced funding interest. . . . In journalism, the Foundation built on the Knight's legacy of support for education as the cornerstone of quality journalism by establishing, salvaging or strengthening some of the profession's most prestigious midcareer fellowship programs for journalists. (Reports of the Knight Foundation Commission, 1991-1993, pp. 39, 37, 33)

The Knight Foundation invested more than \$153 million in its Journalism Program, including more than \$30 million in grants to nonprofit organizations working to improve journalism. That undertaking has also included funding of 16 Knight Chairs of Journalism in endowed tenured teaching positions at various institutions across the country, including the University of Florida, to promote the importance of a free press.

According to the Knight Foundation's Statement of Financial Position as of Dec. 31, 2000, the organization's assets totaled \$2.1 billion. The organization awarded \$113.5 million in grants in 2000 alone (Report of the Knight Foundation Commission, June 2001).

In analyzing the Knight Foundation's history, it would appear initially that intercollegiate athletics did not fall within the primary mission of an organization that had dedicated so many resources to enhancing journalism programs or improving social programs in areas with a Knight-Ridder newspaper. However, at least one Knight Foundation Commission member said the reforming of college sports fit perfectly into the organization's goals.

"Broaden your mind a little," said Dr. William Friday, president emeritus of the University of North Carolina and a Knight Commission co-chairman. "While athletics is the vehicle, the issue is really the integrity of the American university that plays college sports. Knight saw this as a chance to define what the role should be" (W. Friday, personal communication, June 12, 2002).

The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics originated in October of 1989 through the Knight Foundation's Higher Education program.

Knights trustees created the original Commission in 1989, seeing intercollegiate athletic reform as a goal worthy of a foundation that identified higher education as one of its primary interests. (Reports of the Knight Foundation Commission, 1991-1993, p. 36)

When the Knight Commission was initially created in 1989, five former university presidents, including Friday, served on a Knight Foundation higher education advisory board. Friday suggested to Creed Black the possibility of forming a Knight Foundation committee dealing with intercollegiate athletic issues. Black then traveled across the

country to gauge the support of university presidents about the formation of such a commission (W. Friday, personal communication, June 12, 2002).

“The idea was to get together a national blue ribbon commission that would look at proposals and suggest reform agendas concentrating on university athletics,” Black said in explaining the impetus for the Knight Commission (C. Black, personal communication, June 3, 2002). The issue also was important to Black because he was publisher of the *Lexington Herald-Leader* in the fall of 1985 when the newspaper published a series of articles about a scandal involving University of Kentucky basketball players accepting cash and gifts from UK boosters and alumni. *Herald-Leader* staff writers Jeffrey Marx and Michael York, who did the bulk of the research and writing for the series, received anonymous death threats just after the series was published, yet they also won a Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting in 1986 (Marx, York, 1985).

But that was not the only university athletic scandal of the 1980s.

In the 1980s, 109 colleges and universities were censured, sanctioned or put on probation by the NCAA . . . including half the universities playing at the NCAA’s top competitive level, I-A--57 institutions out of 106. Nearly a third of present and former professional football players responding to a survey near the end of the 1980s said they had accepted illicit payments while in college, and more than half said they saw nothing wrong with the practice. (Report of the Knight Foundation Commission, June 2001, p. 9)

A 1989 Associated Press-Media General Survey found that the majority of the general public believed that the institutions with the top athletic programs paid their student-athletes, or did so by a secret payment through the school’s booster club. They also believed those institutions altered student-athlete grades in order to remain eligible. Two-thirds of those surveyed said the colleges overemphasize sports and neglect academic standards for athletes (Thelin, 1996).

The public perception of college sports in the late 1980s may have been epitomized by a July 1989 Louis Harris Poll revealing that eight of 10 individuals from the general public believed intercollegiate athletics were out of control. Other results from that poll were that 79 percent of those surveyed believed a university held a different standard for the academic progress of a star recruit and that 77 percent of those surveyed believes athletic scandals were undermining the traditional role of universities (Knight, 1996h). The atmosphere appeared ideal to form a committee to study the problems facing college sports.

“The real provocation behind it all was the poll Louis Harris did in ‘89,” Friday said. “Most of us being college-identified found that very hard to accept. But the testimony on it was quite clear” (W. Friday, personal communication, June 12, 2002).

“The time was right,” Black said. “Our feeling was that the problem had gotten so serious that it was endangering the integrity of what higher education was all about. The tail was wagging the dog rather than the other way around” (C. Black, personal communication, June 3, 2002).

In testimony Black gave to the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Commerce, Consumer Protection & Competitiveness on June 19, 1991, he further explained why the commission was formed:

It was not . . . out of any hostility toward college athletics. Our interest is not to abolish that role but to preserve it by putting it back in perspective. We saw that as a worthy goal for a foundation which has a major program interest in the field of higher education.

Black convinced the Knight Foundation Board of Trustees of the need for a commission dealing with intercollegiate athletic reform measures. The board of trustees agreed on September 22, 1989, and pledged \$2 million over two years to start the Knight

Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (C. Black, personal communication, June 3, 2002).

On October 19, 1989, Black announced at a press conference in Akron, Ohio, the former home of the Knight Foundation, the formation of the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics. A Knight Foundation press release described the formation of the commission:

The Knight Foundation is establishing a national blue-ribbon commission to develop and build support for a reform agenda for intercollegiate athletics. . . . the commission would be an independent body with no mandate except to make whatever additional study of the problem it considers necessary and then propose specific, workable solutions. (Knight Foundation News Release, 1989)

Black was joined at the conference by Knight Commission co-chairmen, the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, president emeritus of the University of Notre Dame, and Friday. Black said membership on the Knight Commission was based on including university presidents from the major athletic conferences, as well as individuals familiar with intercollegiate athletic reform (C. Black, personal communication, June 3, 2002). When the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics began holding hearings in 1990 to formulate the agenda for its first report, Hesburgh spoke during the fourth hearing on May 15, 1990, about where this commission needed to be different from past intercollegiate athletic commissions (Knight, 1996f).

The last thing we wanted to do was to be redundant. There have been commissions going all the way back to Teddy Roosevelt's time and most of them have accomplished just about nil. They've put out nice reports which have duly gathered dust on various shelves and we don't want to do that. (p. 28)

The first Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics appointee was Richard Schultz, at the time the NCAA's executive director and later an executive director of the U.S. Olympic Committee. Schultz told Black he felt the NCAA would be

receptive to listening to the Knight Commission's recommendations, particularly after Schultz had encouraged NCAA members "to make major changes and major commitments to restructuring and reform" within the organization at the 1989 NCAA Convention. Schultz also helped choose the first commission (C. Black, personal communication, June 3, 2002; R. Schultz, personal communication, June 18, 2002). In addition, each Knight Commission member had to be approved by the Knight Foundation Board of Trustees (Knight, 1996d).

"As names came up, (Black) ran a general list by me," Schultz said. "We talked about what the balance should be; that it needed to be more than just collegiate people. We finally came up with enough names" (R. Schultz, personal communication, June 18, 2002).

"We wanted to make it as representative as possible," Friday said. "That's why we had Afro-Americans, we had women, we had senior college presidents, we had small institution presidents, we had Olympic representation and NCAA representation. We were trying to reflect players to their people. We took people from every conference of the country" (W. Friday, personal communication, June 12, 2002).

On November 16, 1989, the full 21-member initial Knight Commission was announced at another press conference in Akron. Besides co-chairs Hesburgh and Friday, as well as Black, who served as an ex-officio member, and Schultz, the remainder of the first Knight Commission was comprised of:

- Lamar Alexander, president of the University of Tennessee;
- Douglas S. Dibbert from the University of North Carolina and president-elect of the Council of Alumni Association Executives;
- Dr. John A. DiBiaggio, president of Michigan State University;

- Dr. Thomas K. Hearn, president of Wake Forest University;
- J. Lloyd Huck, chairman of the board of Pennsylvania State University;
- Dr. Bryce Jordan, president emeritus of Pennsylvania State University;
- Richard W. Kazmaier, president of Kazmaier & Associates and the last Heisman Trophy winner from the Ivy League when he won the award with Princeton in 1951, as well as chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports;
- Donald R. Keough, president of the Coca-Cola Co.;
- Dr. Martin A. Massengale, president of the University of Nebraska;
- C. Thomas McMillen, U.S. congressman from Maryland, a former NBA basketball player and All-America at the University of Maryland, as well as a Rhodes scholar;
- Dr. Chase N. Peterson, president of the University of Utah;
- Jane C. Pfeiffer, former chairman of NBC;
- Dr. A. Kenneth Pye, president of Southern Methodist University;
- Donna E. Shalala, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Madison;
- Leroy T. Walker, president emeritus of the U.S. Olympic Committee, chancellor emeritus of North Carolina Central University and past president of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics;
- Dr. James J. Whalen, president of Ithaca College and chairman of the American Council of Education;
- Clifton R. Wharton, chairman and CEO of the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association-College Retirement Equities Fund;
- Dr. Charles E. Young, chancellor of the University of California at Los Angeles.

Upon formation in the fall of 1989, the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics opened an office in Charlotte, North Carolina, and hired a three-person staff by the first week of October of 1989. The Knight Commission received more than 25 resumes inquiring about employment opportunities with the commission (Knight, 1996ff). Christopher "Kit" Morris, a former athletic director at Davidson College and

associate athletic director at Yale University, became staff director. Maureen Devlin, who had previously worked in the NCAA compliance and legislative services offices, became assistant staff director. Bryan Skelton became an administrative assistant. All three were hired on a consultant basis with the idea it would be a temporary position, according to Devlin (M. Devlin, personal communication, October 9, 2002). Knight Commission expenses for 1989 were \$146,608, with the majority (\$100,000) being for staff administrative costs to set up the Charlotte office (Knight, 1996n).

The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics held its first meetings on January 30-31, 1990, and devised a strategic plan in which its first set of recommendations for its first report were based on a series of five hearings over the next six months with individuals familiar with intercollegiate athletic policy such as conference commissioners, faculty athletic representatives, athletic directors, coaches, television executives, professional sports representatives and student-athletes. All the hearings were held in Washington, D.C. The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics paid the expenses of all participants to travel to the hearings. Each group was asked to speak about the biggest problems they perceived in intercollegiate athletics and offer some possible solutions (Knight, 1996s).

Knight Commission co-chairman Father Theodore Hesburgh said the commission needed to listen to as many intercollegiate athletic sources to understand the primary problems facing intercollegiate athletics in the late-1980s and early-1990s (Knight, 1996e).

We think if we stay on the main track and pull in as much information as we can from those who are acquainted with the problems and have had to live with them or live against them that is the best thing we can do. (p. 9)

On March 13-14, 1990, the Knight Commission met with conference commissioners from the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten, Southwestern, Mideastern and Big Eight. That was followed by a second hearing with 13 faculty athletic representatives and 16 athletic directors on April 16-17, 1990. On May 14-15, 1990, the third hearing was held with 12 college basketball and football coaches.

The basketball coaches included

- Dale Brown (LSU);
- Bobby Knight (Indiana);
- Mike Kryzewski (Duke);
- Digger Phelps (Notre Dame);
- Dean Smith (North Carolina);
- John Thompson (Georgetown); and
- Roy Williams (Kansas).

Among the football coaches were

- Terry Donahue (UCLA);
- Dennis Green (Stanford);
- Dick MacPherson (Syracuse);
- Tom Osbourne (Nebraska); and
- Joe Paterno (Penn State).

The fifth and final hearing was June 28-29, 1990, with National Football League (NFL) Commissioner Paul Tagliabue, National Basketball Association (NBA) Deputy Commissioner Russ Granik; six student-athletes selected from the NCAA Student-Athlete Committee; several representatives from high school associations; representatives from the NCAA Certification Program; and university faculty. (Knight, 1996s). Several NCAA basketball coaches complimented the Knight Commission for seeking their suggestions on ways to improve college sports during the fourth hearing on May 15, 1990 (Knight, 1996f). Indiana coach Bobby Knight said:

I don't remember one other time where we've ever had a chance to either directly or indirectly have input into things that were affecting basketball. (pp. 36-37)

Notre Dame coach Digger Phelps shared a similar sentiment:

Personally, in 25 years of college coaching, I've never been able to sit down with a group of college presidents and say, 'Hey, listen, here's what we're going through in the battlefield. (p. 140)

"We had a group of power coaches -- the football and basketball coaches -- and one of the first things they said was this is the first time we've ever been asked for our opinion about anything, which I thought was incredible," said Dr. William Friday (W. Friday, personal communication, June 12, 2002).

However, not all participants from those meetings were always supportive of the Knight Commission agenda. Albert Witte, the University of Arkansas faculty athletic representative and NCAA president in 1990, questioned the necessity of the Knight Commission and suggested the commission should shift its emphasis to high schools during the third hearing with faculty athletic representatives on April 16, 1990 (Knight, 1996e).

I had hoped that the Commission would not plow the same ground that has been plowed and replowed and is currently being plowed again by all sorts of other groups. I haven't heard a thing today that strikes me as the first time I have heard it. (p. 125)

"The athletic director at the University of Michigan said 'the presidents get in here and they get all excited and they try to tell us how to run our business, but they'll go away and we'll keep doing what we want,'" Friday said. "That didn't happen this time. They didn't want anything to happen, that's the point" (W. Friday, personal communication, June 12, 2002).

By the time the Knight Commission completed its first five hearings of 1990, the group had met with more than 90 individuals associated with intercollegiate athletics, including conference commissioners, faculty athletic representatives, athletic directors,

senior women administrators, college football and basketball coaches and student-athletes (Reports of the Knight Foundation Commission, 1991-1993). The Knight Commission then met on Sept. 23-25, 1990, in West Palm Beach, Florida, and analyzed testimony from those five hearings and began formulating how it would draft the first report. The commission spent the remainder of the fall of 1990 revising the first report and its recommendations. Knight Commission member Dr. James J. Whalen said in a December 4, 1990, letter faxed to Kit Morris and Maureen Devlin that the report still needed to be revised and edited more sharply:

The most serious concern I would share is that I don't think the report packs enough "punch" relative to the expectations we have raised in several quarters. We have gone to great lengths to publicize and promote the Knight Commission and its deliberations with the idea that the resulting recommendations would be the key elements in furthering the athletic reform movement. (Knight, 1996e)

In helping prioritize its recommendations, the Knight Commission also hired the public polling group Louis Harris and Associates of New York City in the fall of 1990 to conduct a follow-up survey from its 1989 poll on intercollegiate athletics. Harris, founder of Louis Harris and Associates of New York City, a public polling organization, was an acquaintance of Black and attended several of the commission hearings throughout 1990. At the first commission hearing on Jan. 30-31, 1990, Harris released the findings of a college athletics poll conducted by his organization to aid the Knight Commission in creating a framework for the first report. That 1989 poll found that 77 percent of respondents believed college athletic scandals "undermined the traditional role of universities" and that 78 percent of the general public and 75 percent of sports fans believed college athletics were "out of control." (Knight, 1996e)

In a December 14, 1990, letter to Black, Harris outlined the parameters of the follow-up survey his organization would conduct for the Knight Commission. The plan

was for the Harris follow-up survey to be released with the first report and then a second Harris poll to be released prior to the third report to show the impact the Knight Commission had made in reforming college athletics since its inception in 1989 (Knight, 1996c).

Harris and Associates were paid more than \$200,000 for conducting the follow-up survey and second poll. The follow-up survey consisted of phone interviews with approximately 1,000 individuals affiliated with intercollegiate athletics and another 1,250 randomly selected individuals from the general public (from December of 1990 through January of 1991) to determine their main concerns involving intercollegiate athletics (Knight, 1996p). Harris and Associates conducted 2,273 phone interviews from December 18, 1990-February 17, 1991, and split the responses into separate categories such as university presidents, university trustees, athletic directors, faculty athletic representatives, members of Congress and male and female athletes (Knight, 1996h).

Each group was asked to evaluate the extent of problems in intercollegiate athletics and then their support for and belief in the effectiveness of a series of reform proposals. ... The purpose of the project goes beyond a straight up or down read on a series of reform proposals. It maps out which reforms are perceived as most important and how the whole array of constituencies line up on reform. (p. i)

Participants were asked their views on college sports at the time the survey was conducted in the early 1990s. Each participant was asked specifically about the biggest problem facing college sports. In relation to this research, the two primary questions asked in the survey were

- 1) What is the extent of the problem?
- 2) Do you believe the problem is a threat to the integrity of universities?

In response to the first question, the following majorities felt intercollegiate athletics were out of control: 81% of faculty; 75% of the general public; 68% of trustees;

59% of members of Congress. In response to the second question, if serious rules violations have undermined the integrity of universities, the majority of the following groups agreed with that statement: 85% of faculty representatives; 76% of presidents; 75% of trustees; 69% of athletic directors; 63% of coaches; and 56% of boosters (Knight, 1996h).

By the spring of 1991, the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics was prepared to release its first report, *Keeping Faith With The Student-Athlete: A New Model for Intercollegiate Athletics*.

That document ... placed less emphasis on specific solutions for the problems in college sports and more on proposing a structure for reform. (Reports of the Knight Foundation Commission, 1991-1993, p. 10)

The Knight Commission's primary reform model, "one-plus-three," originated in the first report. The "one-plus-three" model was defined as university presidents (being the "one") having direct control over an entire university athletic department, including trustees, alumni and boosters. The "three" would consist of :

- academic integrity - a student's eligibility would be measured by their academic performance and continual progress toward a degree;
- financial integrity - all athletic funds would be approved and funneled through a university's financial department;
- independent certification - universities would go through an annual independent audit on all athletic department matters as well as undergo a certification program to ensure the athletic department is adhering to that individual university's financial and academic policy. (Report of the Knight Foundation Commission, March 1991)

"We felt those were the things that created a lot of attention," Schultz said in explaining why the Knight Commission concentrated reforms in those three areas. "We felt the graduation rate was not where it should be. We felt the athletic expenditures were out of control. And we felt corporate sponsorships were starting to play a big part. The

need for corporate dollars were starting to dictate policy” (R. Schultz, personal communication, June 18, 2002).

Several Knight Commission members said that first report made the most substantial progress in intercollegiate athletic reform of the four reports the commission issued (C. Young, personal communication, June 19, 2002; R. Schultz, personal communication, June 18, 2002). For the purpose of this research, the first Knight Commission report was the primary report studied. The Knight Commission also issued ensuing reports in 1992, 1993 and 2001.

By the spring of 1991, the Knight Commission completed all the revisions and was prepared to release the 47-page first report, *Keeping Faith With The Student-Athlete: A New Model for Intercollegiate Athletics*. In order to maximize publicity for the report, the commission planned to announce the findings of the report, along with the findings of the 1990-91 Louis Harris poll, at a morning press conference on March 19, 1991, followed later that evening by the airing of a documentary produced by Bill Moyers of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). The poll and documentary pertained to intercollegiate athletics and were funded by the Knight Commission (Knight, 1996g).

Several Knight Commission members said Moyers added credibility to the work of the commission. In more than 25 years of broadcasting, Moyers is considered an acclaimed journalist for establishing Public Affairs Television in 1986, as well as Bill Moyers’ Journal. He is a former senior news analyst for the CBS Evening News and a chief correspondent for CBS Reports. He has produced a series of investigative, cultural pieces for the Public Broadcasting Systems and has won more than 30 Emmy Awards for excellence by The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. He was elected to

the Television Hall of Fame in 1995 and is a former recipient of the Gold Baton from Columbia University (Moyers, 2002).

To bring greater visibility to the Knight Commission report and the work of the commission, the Knight Commission also paid the public relations firm Hill & Knowlton of New York City more than \$50,000 from October of 1990 through March of 1993 to publicize the first three reports (Knight Commission, 1996n). According to Creed Black, Hill & Knowlton developed a list of media contacts, prepared and distributed press releases, made arrangements for the Knight Commission press conferences and set up interviews and media appearances by Knight Commission members (C. Black, e-mail, October 1, 2002).

According to the Knight Commission budgets from 1989 through mid-1992, the commission spent \$12,241 on public relations in 1989, \$7,744 in 1990 and \$153,269 in 1991 (Knight, 1996p).

The Knight Commission spent \$137,483 on the printing and distribution of the first report. According to the Knight Commission Report Distribution Scenarios, more than 20,000 copies of the report were printed and sent to university trustees, presidents, athletic directors, conference commissioners, senior women athletics administrators, faculty athletic representatives, guests who spoke at commission hearings and university libraries. Knight Commission members could also obtain extra copies of the report.

According to the Knight Commission budget of June 30, 1992, the group spent \$300,000 on the production of the Bill Moyers' 1991 documentary. The Knight Commission also funded two informational videos about trustees' proper role in athletics

and another video Knight Commission could use for speaking engagements (Knight, 1996n).

On March 19, 1991, a significant day for the Knight Commission, the first report was released at a morning press conference at the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C. Later that evening, the 90-minute Moyers documentary, “Sports for Sale,” aired on PBS, followed by a 30-minute, televised panel discussion moderated by Moyers with several Knight Commission members, including co-chairs Hesburgh and Friday. “Sports for Sale” dealt with the problems facing intercollegiate athletics in the United States in the early 1990s.

The release of the findings from the first report warranted enough interest that 12 national media outlets were among the 43 affiliates attending the press conference. More than 200 people attended the morning press conference, including reporters from the following media outlets: Cox Broadcasting, CBS News, Cox Communications, NewsLink, *The New York Times*, ESPN, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, CNN, ABC News, Newhouse Newspapers, the *Baltimore Sun*, *Potomac News*, Group-W TV, *Des Moines Register*, Education Daily, Unistar News, *Winston-Salem Journal*, *USA Today*, *Ann Arbor News*, *Akron Beacon-Journal*, ABC Radio, *United Press International* (UPI), *Education Week*, *U.S. News & World Report*, the *Associated Press* (AP), the *Los Angeles Times*, *Catholic News Service*, *Lincoln (Neb.) Star*, Knight-Ridder newspapers, WUSA-TV (Washington, D.C.), Scripps-Howard News Service, Kiplinger’s, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* and the *Voice of America* (Knight, 1996b).

Several Knight Commission members said that media attention was a positive step in helping promote the commission's agenda (C. Black, personal communication, June 3, 2002). Several of those national newspapers published Knight Commission stories prominently in their March 20, 1991, editions--on either the front page of the entire paper or the front page of the sports section--on the release of the report.

The Washington Post published three Knight Commission stories on March 20: a lead story on its front page, a column by sports columnist Thomas Boswell on the front page of the sports section and an editorial on its editorial page. *The Washington Times* published one story on the front page of the sports section. *USA Today* published a short story and a box including some of the Knight Commission recommendations on its front page, as well as another sidebar story on the inside of its sports section. *The New York Times* published a story on the front page of its sports section with a three-column jump to an inside page, including a two-column box listing the names and titles of all Knight Commission members, as well as the address to write to receive a copy of the report.

In analyzing Knight Commission media coverage, it is important to consider whether the commission used its connections to Knight-Ridder Inc. to sway public opinion on the findings. Did more Knight-Ridder papers attend the Knight Commission press conference? Was there also a greater probability that a commission member's hometown newspaper would attend the press conference?

Creed Black said in an October 1, 2002, e-mail that because the Knight Foundation is a private foundation and operates independently of Knight-Ridder Inc., "We were in no position to 'use' those newspapers for anything. I personally was disappointed in the Knight-Ridder coverage, or rather lack of it, throughout the life of the commission

because I thought the papers were ignoring the corruption of college athletics, often in their own backyards” (C. Black, e-mail, October 1, 2002).

The Charlotte Observer, a Knight-Ridder newspaper, ran a preview story the day of the press conference announcing that the commission’s findings would be released that day, then published three stories--on the front page, the front page of the sports section and on the editorial page--the following day. One of those stories, “Commission membership has North Carolina flavor,” featured the North Carolina connections to the commission: Dr. William Friday was former president of the state’s university system, Dr. Thomas K. Hearn was president of Wake Forest University in Durham, N.C.; Leroy Walker was a former coach at North Carolina Central University and Douglas Dibbert was affiliated with the General Alumni Association of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

The Charlotte Observer and the *Akron Beacon Journal*, along with a Knight-Ridder representative, were the only Knight-Ridder newspapers at the press conference. That meant those newspapers could run their stories on the Knight-Ridder wire, allowing other Knight-Ridder newspapers such as *The Miami Herald*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Wichita Eagle* and *The Lexington Herald-Leader* access to Knight Commission coverage and to be able to run follow-up stories on March 20. The *Akron Beacon Journal* is in the former hometown of the Knight Foundation, *The Miami Herald* is in the current hometown of the Knight Foundation and *The Lexington Herald-Leader*’s former publisher was Knight Commission member Creed Black. The *Los Angeles Times* ran a front-page story on March 20; Knight Commission member Dr. Charles Young was chancellor of UCLA at the time.

Many of those second-day stories were confined to news coverage of the press conference. It was not until the five to seven days following the announcement that more critical stories of the Knight Commission began appearing. Many of those criticisms accused the Knight Commission of not offering enough specific solutions for reforming college sports.

In a March 25, 1991, story in *The Washington Post*, writer Jonathan Yardley said the Knight Commission “offends no one and therefore may please everyone . . . it offers nothing more than ‘symbolic reform . . . and shies away from real reform.’” David Halahan, in a USA Today editorial on March 22, criticized the Knight Commission for spending a year on a study that offered no new findings or solutions. Ira Berkow of *The New York Times* in a March 22 story and Richard Demak of *Sports Illustrated* in the April 1 edition paralleled the Knight Commission with the Carnegie Foundation, intimating that neither group offered the drastic changes needed to truly reform college sports. In *Games Colleges Play: Scandal and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics*, author John R. Thelin said historically that groups without any power to legislate reform, such as the Knight Commission, have difficulty in implementing their recommendations.

Although the report of a major foundation or a higher education association provides a broad view and a national context for problems between academics and athletics that have percolated up from the various colleges and universities, it does not follow that a report or recommendations from a blue ribbon panel or a national commission leads to reform. (Thelin, 1996, p. 11)

Even prior to the release of Knight Commission findings, author Murray Sperber, in the Jan.-Feb. 1991 edition of *Academe*, a higher education trade publication, said, “This commission has been long on hearings and short on ideas.”

In his 2000 book, *Campus Chaos: Why The Game I Love is Breaking My Heart*, college basketball television analyst Dick Vitale, while not specifically criticizing the

Knight Foundation Commission, said athletic department decisions should be made by athletic department officials and not university presidents. Vitale said, “A basketball coach wouldn’t tell a psychology prof how to draw up a curriculum for his class” (Vitale & Weiss, 2000, p. 91).

Sperber wrote about many of the issues the Knight Commission addressed in his 2000 book, *Beer and Circus: How Big-time College Sports Is Crippling Undergraduate Education*. In the book, Sperber illustrated how a university president has public sentiment against him when dealing with a popular coach, player or athletic director involved in a scandal--suggesting that presidential control over athletic departments may be unrealistic at many universities. Sperber also intimated that university presidents were hesitant to take control over athletic department finances, which often allowed those expenses to go unfettered.

The Knight Commission went through a lengthy process of holding the five hearings to help identify the major problems in college sports and then build its first report around those problems. However, extensive planning also went into determining the best method for releasing the reports to bring awareness to major issues facing college sports. That is why the commission brought in a New York City public relations firm and funded a documentary produced by renowned public affairs journalist Bill Moyers. The commission obviously was hoping for as much media attention as possible.

CHAPTER 4 REACTIONS TO THE FIRST KNIGHT COMMISSION REPORT

While media coverage of the first report was important to the Knight Commission, another area that needed to be considered was how the commission would be perceived by those individuals not in the media, particularly those in higher education. The higher education spectrum was split into the athletic community, such as coaches, athletic directors and conference commissioners, and the academic community, such as university administrators and faculty.

In evaluating the impact of the first Knight Commission report, two primary areas to consider included:

- I. Academic Responses -- actions taken by universities in responding to the report;
- II. Federal Legislation -- federal legislation originating as a result of the report.

Academic Responses

The academic community, those not directly involved in intercollegiate athletics, had a mixed reaction to the Knight Commission report. Presidents, boards of trustees, higher education associations and athletic conferences welcomed the opportunity to reform college athletics.

The Knight Commission tracked the responses of universities after sending the first report by including a survey along with the report for universities to complete. Among the group that returned the survey: 24 universities adopted or endorsed the report; seven adopted the report “in principle”; six endorsed the report; seven supported or adopted certain recommendations from the report; 20 supported the general philosophy of the

report; 29 mentioned the report in athletic department discussions; eight supported the commission; and 24 responded only that they had received the report (Knight, 1996b).

Endorsements from presidents in particular offered strong support for the work of the Knight Commission. In letters written to Black, University of Miami Communications Dean Edward J. Pfister said, “in my view, it is already a success,” while Louis J. Batson Jr., chairman of the board of trustees of Clemson University, said, “the Knight Commission can be proud that it took the initiative to do such a report” (Knight, 1996b).

In a March 22 letter to Black, University of New Orleans Chancellor Gregory M St. L. O’Brien said, “the document stands as a wonderful blueprint for us.” Two March 25 letters to Black also contained strong support, with Midwestern State University President Louis J. Rodriguez saying, “it contains superb recommendations,” and Davidson College President John W. Kuykendall said he was “impressed with the breadth and balance of the job.”

Higher education associations also endorsed the Knight Commission. Alan Pifer, chairman of the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis, described the report as being, “clear, forceful and courageous and tackles the issues head on,” in a March 25 letter to Dr. William Friday. The National Association of College Admission Counselor’s Executive Board also endorsed the report, as did the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities and the American Council on Education and the General Alumni Association of the University of North Carolina (Knight, 1996b).

Public universities, such as the board of trustees of the University of North Carolina, University of Pittsburgh and Southern Methodist University and the presidents of Virginia's public universities, offered support with resolutions either endorsing the Knight Commission recommendations or adopting new resolutions based on the first report. Penn State University requested 125 copies of the report and distributed them to all of the university's head coaches and assistant coaches. The Knight Commission recommendations were also endorsed by larger conferences such as the Big 10 and Western Athletic Conference, as well as smaller conferences such as the Patriot League, Southern Conference and Mon-Dak Conference (Knight, 1996b).

Several schools also created committees to reevaluate their compliance to parts of the Knight Commission report. In the fall of 1991, Syracuse University formed a Faculty Oversight Committee to investigate a scandal involving the school's men's basketball program as well as consider restructuring the athletic department (Knight, 1996t). Texas A&M University formed a Knight Commission Task Force of students, alumni and administrators to study the school's compliance with the Knight Commission report and used the report as the primary part of a meeting amongst the school's faculty, students, administrators, athletic department personnel and coaches (Knight, 1996u). The University of Nevada at Las Vegas created a version of the Knight Commission report, "The College Student-Athlete Project," to examine the relationship between academics and athletics at the school (Knight, 1996v).

"From the presidents it was very positive," said Knight Commission member Richard Schultz in explaining the reaction from parts of the academic community. "It was mostly positive from the conference commissioners. You had some coaches and athletic

directors that probably grumbled a little bit. It's hard to come up with something to make everybody happy. For something like that and the findings we came up with, it was very, very positive, much more so than I thought" (R. Schultz, personal communication, June 18, 2002).

Faculty, however, were more skeptical. Several Knight Commission members intimated faculty did not closely follow the actions of the Knight Commission (W. Friday, personal communication, June 12, 2002; T. Hearn, personal communication, June 25, 2002).

"There was probably a lot more interest on the part of administrators than faculty," said Dr. Thomas K. Hearn, Wake Forest University president and Knight Commission member. "Faculty members have always taken a kind of arm's length attitude toward intercollegiate athletics" (T. Hearn, personal communication, June 25, 2002).

Knight Commission co-chairman Dr. William Friday described the faculty tone toward the Knight Commission--and intercollegiate athletics in general. "Most of the faculty at these institutions have defaulted," Friday said. "They will not exercise any action. They've grown cynical about it. They've seen the abuses of it. They've seen the coaches paid those terrible salaries. They see the stature of the president riding on the football team. They see them (the presidents) wearing the (school) sweatshirts (on TV). They've (faculty) given up or capitulated" (W. Friday, personal communication, June 12, 2002).

Knight Commission member C. Thomas McMillen said the perception was that the group should have made more powerful recommendations. "It was not enough, but people always say this is not enough," McMillen said. "What the first Knight

Commission did was prod the system. It was more of a jaw-boning exercise. You can't take a group of presidents and get them to blow up the system. It was done to rebuild the system and that much happened" (T. McMillen, personal communication, June 21, 2002).

Federal Legislation

During the first Knight Commission hearings and release of the first report, McMillen was a U.S. congressman from Maryland. McMillen also played professional basketball in the NBA, and following his term in Congress, he later served as a co-chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. However, McMillen's ties to the U.S. government resulted in one of the pieces of federal legislation involving the Knight Commission.

The first piece of legislation came from U.S. Congressman Richard E. Neal of Massachusetts. During the first session of the 102nd Congress on April 11, 1991, less than one month after the release of the first Knight Commission report, Neal introduced Resolution 119, encouraging institutions to implement the work of the Knight Commission. Resolution 119 further urged the NCAA to consider the Knight Commission recommendations at its 1992 Convention and proposed federal legislation to protect student-athletes. (H. Con. Res. 119) However, in an April 15, 1991 letter from Knight Commission co-chairman Father Theodore Hesburgh to Rep. Neal, Hesburgh discouraged Congress from becoming involved in policing intercollegiate athletics. Hesburgh said the framework for individual institutional policing came from the Knight Commission's independent certification proposal.

During the second session of the 102nd Congress on July 25, 1991, Rep. McMillen also introduced the Collegiate Athletics Reform Act (H.R. 3046),¹ which covered 10 steps for reforming intercollegiate athletics and threatened federal intervention if the NCAA and individual institutions did not comply. Among those 10 steps included the Knight Commission recommendations of presidential control of the NCAA and disallowing institutions from revoking a scholarship if a student-athlete maintains minimum academic requirements of that institution. In addition, the bill paralleled the Knight Commission recommendation of presidential approval of all athletic expenses by requiring institutions to send its revenues and expenditures for each sport to the U.S. Department of Education. The Collegiate Athletic Reform Act was sent to six sub-committees in the week following its introduction and was still waiting for approval as of the fall of 2002.

¹The Collegiate Athletics Reform Act would grant the NCAA a temporary exemption from antitrust laws so the NCAA could negotiate exclusive contracts with commercial sponsors and the use of those sponsors' logos in post-season events involving NCAA member institutions. It would also allow the NCAA the right to sell the telecast of those post-season events. That antitrust exemption was one of three main parts of the bill. The second part of the bill, Tax Provisions, would amend the Internal Revenue Code to allow income and deductions from the television contract in the first part to be allowed in determining the NCAA's or a member's institution's unrelated business income. The third part of the bill, Education Program Requirements, would require institutions to disclose their total revenues and expenses for each sport to prospective student-athletes, as well as requiring athletic scholarships be renewed each year of the student-athlete is making satisfactory academic progress. *Bill Summary & Status for the 102nd Congress*, H.R. 3046, Sponsor: Rep. McMillen, introduced 07/25/91.

CHAPTER 5 KNIGHT COMMISSION AND THE NCAA

In evaluating the success of the Knight Commission, an important factor was the commission's relationship with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the organization which sets athletic policy and enforces athletic regulations for intercollegiate athletics. The Knight Commission shared an important relationship with the NCAA since the largest NCAA structural change was based on a recommendation from the commission. However, to understand the role of the Knight Commission and NCAA, it is necessary to briefly examine the history of intercollegiate athletic governance in the United States and where the NCAA fits into that context.

Concerned about the dangers of the new sport of football in 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt convened two conferences to consider reform measures for football. During the second reform meeting on December 28 in New York City, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS), the first governing organization for intercollegiate athletics, was created with 62 members. By 1910, the IAAUS became the NCAA. For its first decade of existence, the NCAA primarily developed rules for college sports. In 1921, the NCAA staged its first national championship between member institutions, the National Collegiate Track and Field Championships. National championships in other sports began being held in the 1920s and 1930s.

A series of crises brought the NCAA to a crossroads after World War II. The "Sanity Code"--adopted to establish guidelines for recruiting and financial aid--failed to curb abuses involving student-athletes. Postseason football games were multiplying rapidly. Member institutions were increasingly concerned about the

effects of unrestricted television on football attendance. (NCAA Online, 2002, from <http://www.ncaa.org/about/history.html>)

Walter Byers was the NCAA's first executive director in 1951, and the NCAA established its national headquarters in Kansas City in 1952. The organization's first structural change occurred in 1973 when the NCAA split into three divisions based on the number of varsity sports an institution sponsors. In 1978, Division I football was expanded into three divisions of I, I-A and I-AA. The NCAA established women's athletic programs in 1980 and formed a governing plan for women's athletics in 1983, as well as creating 19 national championships for women's sports.

As of 2002, NCAA membership was comprised of approximately 1,200 higher education institutions, athletic conferences and non-profit sports organizations affiliated with amateur athletics. Of the 1,200 NCAA members, more than 1,000 are higher education institutions. In 2002, the NCAA hierarchy consisted of a 19-person, Executive Committee with representatives from all three divisions serving four-year terms. The Executive Committee meets four times a year and initiates and votes on all NCAA legislation. The only individuals who can vote on NCAA legislation are Executive Committee members (NCAA Online, 2002, from http://www.ncaa.org/about/div_criteria.html). This voting system has been in place since 1997. The Knight Commission played a pivotal role in helping implement that system.

Presidential Control of NCAA and the Knight Commission's Role

Since the Knight Commission did not have the authority nor power to either set or enforce intercollegiate athletic policy, and was essentially only offering recommendations, it was crucial that the commission establish a positive working relationship with the NCAA in order to promote its reform agenda. Those members said

it was important to maintain that positive working relationship in order to avoid the perception that the Knight Commission was trying to take over the role of the NCAA (C. Black, personal communication, June 3, 2002).

From the time the Knight Commission was formed in 1989, the group made continual efforts to involve the NCAA in its reform agenda. Five Knight Commission members were also members of the NCAA, including NCAA chairman Dr. Martin Massengale, president of the University of Nebraska, in 1990 when the Knight Commission held hearings prior to the release of its first report. University of Oklahoma law professor and faculty athletic representative Dan Gibbons urged the Knight Commission during the commission's third hearing on April 16, 1990, to maintain a close relationship with the NCAA in order to promote the Knight Commission's reform agenda (Knight, 1996e).

In addition, at the time the Knight Commission released each of its four reports from 1991-2001, the two NCAA executive directors during that time period served as Knight Commission members. Several Knight Commission felt that connection was beneficial in making NCAA policy-makers aware of Knight Commission recommendations. Richard Schultz, the NCAA's executive director from 1987-1993, was the first Knight Commission member selected after Creed Black and co-chairs Dr. William Friday and Father Theodore Hesburgh. Cedric Dempsey, who succeeded Schultz as NCAA executive director in 1993 and announced his intentions to resign from that post in 2002, served on the final Knight Commission when the group reconvened in 2001. Schultz, who served as executive director of the United States Olympic Committee following his NCAA tenure, served on the Knight Commission throughout its entirety.

“If you’re talking about intercollegiate athletics, you’ve got to be in dialogue with the NCAA,” said Knight Commission member Dr. Thomas Hearn. “If Dick or Ced had declined to participate, the chance for effectiveness would have been measurably impaired” (T. Hearn, personal communication, June 25, 2002).

Knight Commission member Dr. Charles Young said it was important that Schultz and Dempsey share the commission’s reform plans. “Dick Schultz and Ced Dempsey were advocates of the kinds of reform recommendations which were made,” Young said. “They didn’t agree with everything, but by and large they were supportive” (C. Young, personal communication, June 19, 2002).

Dempsey wrote about his willingness to work with the Knight Commission when it reconvened in 2001 in an August 22, 2000, introductory statement from a section of the NCAA Web site (<http://www.ncaa.org/enforcefrontF.html>), “2000 NCAA Review of Principles Identified By The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics” This NCAA publication compared each of the recommendations from the first 1991 Knight Commission report to what action the NCAA took based on each recommendation. Before examining those recommendations and ensuing NCAA action, it is necessary to understand the difference in the Knight Commission and the NCAA-affiliated President’s Commission and how those two commissions worked together to achieve presidential control of the NCAA.

The original Knight Commission of 1991 consisted of six university presidents who also served on the President’s Commission. “There was a lot of commerce between the leadership level of the NCAA and the Knight Commission and a lot of effort to

collaborate and cooperate,” said Hearn (T. Hearn, personal communication, June 25, 2002).

Prior to 1996, the NCAA was controlled by the President’s Commission and the NCAA Council, which acted independently of each other but still each had the power to set NCAA legislation. The President’s Commission was established in 1984 and consisted of 44 presidents or chancellors from all three of the NCAA’s divisions to examine intercollegiate athletic issues, particularly as they pertained to a president or chancellor. The President’s Commission could propose legislation and determine the voting order at NCAA Conventions. The NCAA Council dealt with NCAA policy and could also bring forth legislation to NCAA Conventions. The NCAA Council was comprised of presidents, athletic directors and faculty representatives (R. Schultz, e-mail, September 15, 2002).

In that pre-1996 system, each Division I -- the largest of the NCAA’s three divisions -- institution was guaranteed an equal vote on NCAA legislation. While presidents still controlled NCAA legislation prior to 1996, many presidents did not attend the annual NCAA Convention and allowed faculty representatives or athletic directors from their institution to vote in their place (R. Schultz, e-mail, September 15, 2002). This created a chaotic situation since many athletic directors held a separate agenda from the presidents.

“The NCAA was almost ungovernable,” Hearn said in describing the pre-1996 NCAA. “It had so many factions and so many interests that it was hard to get any focus around a particular issue” (T. Hearn, personal communication, June 25, 2002).

A major change for the NCAA occurred at the 1996 NCAA Convention in Dallas. It was there that delegates voted by a 777-79-1 margin to restructure the NCAA hierarchy by eliminating the President's Commission and NCAA Council and implementing a 20-member Executive Committee consisting of presidents or chancellors from the board of directors of 12 major athletic conferences, two presidents from Division II schools, two presidents from Division III schools, one chairman from each of the Division I, Division II and Division III Management Councils and the NCAA executive director. No longer would each institution have its own separate vote on NCAA legislation. The voting would now be relegated to this group of presidents and chancellors, each serving a three-year term. A story in the January 15, 1996, edition of *The NCAA News* described the restructuring as, "one of the most dramatic changes in NCAA history ... and represents the beginning of what proponents say will be a much more efficient, federated Association in which chief executive officers will exercise more control than ever before" (Pickle, 1996, p. 1).

Presidents or chancellors now controlled intercollegiate athletic policy, which was the framework of the Knight Commission agenda for reforming intercollegiate athletic policy. Several Knight Commission members said the presidential control issue was the most significant piece of reform offered by the commission and provided evidence that the NCAA was carefully following the Knight Commission agenda.

"The whole concept of the one plus three that presidents had to be in control was the most important one," Schultz said. "The other areas that fell under that--the financial stability and accountability and independent certification--all had their own niches. But the first thing we really pounded on was that the presidents had to be in charge. If they

were in charge, then a lot of other things would fall into place” (R. Schultz, personal communication, June 18, 2002).

In testimony during the fourth Knight Commission hearing on May 15, 1990, Indiana University basketball coach Bobby Knight also said presidents ought to control athletic department matters (Knight, 1996f).

I made a statement a long time ago that we’re not going to get hold or control of intercollegiate athletics until presidents take both an active and a sincere role in it. I think that historically, presidents have let the business of athletics be handled by people in the athletic department. (p. 37)

Schultz argued for presidential control of the NCAA as early as the Knight Commission’s first hearing on January 31, 1990. During that hearing, Schultz testified that a common occurrence at universities was a head coach allying with the university’s booster club on athletic department matters or for a university’s booster club to become so powerful it dealt directly with the head coach. In both of those scenarios, the university president would be left out of making important athletic department decisions (Knight, 1996c).

In testimony during the Knight Foundation Commission’s second hearing on March 13-14, 1990, Creed Black said presidents, not booster clubs, should have final authority on all athletic department matters. Black was responding to an inquiry about the increasing number of athletic departments funded by private foundations based outside the university (Knight, 1996d).

If a separate foundation and private corporation are attached to the host university, it provides great temptation for a corporate autonomy outside the president and the university board. The president and the board of trustees should have assurances that they, not the foundation board, are the ones to whom the athletic department must be accountable. (pp. 80-81)

Schultz also said many universities exist where the president could hire or fire any university employee except for the athletic director or head football coach (Knight, 1996c). During the second hearing on March 13-14, 1990, two Knight Foundation Commission members shared personal experiences relating to a university president's power versus that of a popular basketball or football coach. Dr. Charles E. Young, chancellor at UCLA during the 1970s and 1980s, said if UCLA basketball coach John Wooden committed an NCAA violation, he could fire him, despite Wooden's legendary status. Knight Commission co-chair Father Theodore Hesburgh, the president of the University of Notre Dame at the time of Knight Commission hearings in 1990, said when he was vice president at Notre Dame, he told the school's football coach, Frank Leahy, that only 38 players would be allowed to travel to an away game, and Hesburgh was attempting to bring 44 players on the trip. The Notre Dame president supported Hesburgh, even against a popular football coach, and only the 38 players traveled on the trip (Knight, 1996d).

Other Knight Commission members shared Schultz's sentiment that the presidential control issue held the greatest priority on the commission's agenda.

Hearn said "giving presidential control over the NCAA was still a work in progress, but it was huge"(T. Hearn, personal communication, June 25, 2002).

Another commission member echoed Hearn's sentiments. "You don't put the president in charge, you're not going to have all those other things," Friday said (W. Friday, personal communication, June 12, 2002).

Young agreed with Hearn and Friday. "There's much more presidential involvement at the institutional level than there was before, and there's more presidential

authority in the NCAA than there was before,” Young said. “The approach that was taken to provide more presidential control was the right approach” (C. Young, personal communication, June 19, 2002).

Presidential control was also the first of four Knight Commissions issues that the NCAA addressed in its publication, “2000 NCAA Review of Principles Identified By The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics.” The NCAA followed the Knight Commission’s “one plus three” model of presidential control over academic integrity, financial integrity and independent certification in listings its actions based on the Knight Commission recommendations.

The following are NCAA actions from the original Knight Commission 1991 recommendations based on the “2000 NCAA Review of Principles Identified By The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics” or based on information from the Knight Commission’s 2001 report, *A Call To Action*, (www.ncaa.org/enforcefrontF.html).

Presidential Control

I. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** Trustees should explicitly endorse and reaffirm presidential authority in athletics governance, delegate authority over finances, affirm the president’s authority for personnel, and annually review athletics program.

NCAA Action: No specific action taken. Individual institutional decision.

II. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** Presidents should act on their obligation to control conferences.

NCAA Action: Presidential approval of conference legislation was approved at the 1992 NCAA Convention.

III. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** Presidents should control the NCAA.

NCAA Action: Since August 1997, the Division I Board of Directors can adopt Division I legislation and policies and a budget. The NCAA Executive Committee consists entirely of presidents, with 12 representing Division I institutions.

IV. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** Presidents should commit their institutions to equality in all aspects of athletics.

NCAA Action: The NCAA Executive Committee established a permanent subcommittee on gender and diversity and there were these actions on the following levels:

- From 1991-2000, the number of women competing in Division I National Collegiate Championships increased by 57 percent.
- The Division II Presidents Council has made a commitment for Division II championships to achieve equality status by 2002.
- A Division II strategic plan includes enhancing the role of Division II senior women administrators.
- Division III is implementing consistent access to NCAA championships for all team sports.
- A “support ethnic and gender diversity” will be included in the Division III Philosophy.

V. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** Presidents should control their institution’s involvement with commercial television.

NCAA Action: The NCAA annual budget is approved by the Executive Committee and reviewed quarterly. Presidential approval is required for all major commercial contracts. However, testimony before the 2000-2001 Knight Commission indicated presidents did not play key roles in the negotiations for the Bowl Championship Series (BCS)² postseason football bowl games. Conference commissioners have done all the

² The Bowl Championship Series (BCS) is a system used for determining the two teams that will play each January in the college football national championship game in a rotational basis among the Fiesta, Orange, Rose and Sugars bowls. The two teams are decided by a system involving their won-loss records, average rank in national polls, strength of schedule, and quality “wins,” considered a victory over a top 15

negotiating of BCS contracts since the BCS format went into place in 1998. Conference commissioners control distributions of all Division I-A postseason football revenues. The NCAA is limited in its involvement in negotiating television contracts for football games following the Supreme Court decision in *NCAA v. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma*, 468 U.S. 85, 1984.³

Academic Integrity

- I. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** The NCAA should strengthen initial eligibility requirements. The number of required units of high school academic work for initial eligibility should be raised from 11 to 15.⁴

opponent. The BCS grew out of 1991 partnership originally called the Bowl Coalition between five athletic conferences and the University of Notre Dame. The agreement stipulated the Southeastern Conference (SEC), Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big East Conference, Southwest Conference and Big 8 Conference, as well as Notre Dame would send their highest-ranked teams to one of these bowl games: Orange, Sugar, Cotton, Fiesta, Gator and Sun. However, that '91 partnership did not guarantee a national championship game between the two top-ranked teams. That changed in 1995 when the Bowl Alliance was formed out of the Bowl Coalition, which guaranteed a national championship game if the game were played in the Fiesta, Orange or Sugar bowls. The Big-10 and Pac-10, whose conference champions traditionally meet in the Rose Bowl, did not initially join the Bowl Alliance. That meant if a Big-10 or Pac-10 team ended the year No. 1 or No. 2, they would still meet in the Rose Bowl -- leaving the Bowl Alliance without a true national championship game. That also changed in 1998 when the Big-10 and Pac-10 agreed to join the Bowl Alliance, which became the BCS in 1998. Rob Marino. (2001). The state of college football: Is the BCS a bunch of B.S.? Unpublished report, University of Florida. Retrieved November 3, 2002, from <http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/fall01/marino/page3.htm>

³ Prior to the 1984 Supreme Court decision in *NCAA v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma*, the NCAA negotiated all television contracts for member institutions. The Supreme Court ruled that by negotiating on behalf of the member institutions, the NCAA was violating the Sherman Antitrust Act and was a "restraint of trade" in not allowing those schools to negotiate their own television contracts. Prior to this ruling, the NCAA's television contract with ABC and CBS Sports prohibited any school from appearing on national television more than six times in a two-year period. Schools are paid a "rights fee" by television networks for appearing in a televised game. Members of the College Football Association (CFA), which in the mid-1980s consisted of five major athletic conferences and the University of Notre Dame, said they were hurt financially by being limited to six appearances. The Universities of Oklahoma and Georgia filed the suit against the NCAA, arguing that member's institutions should be allowed to negotiate their own television contracts. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs. Doyice J. Cotten, John T. Wolohan, T. Jesse Wilde, Law for Recreation and Sports Managers, 2nd ed. (Kendell/Hunt Publishing Company, 2001).

⁴ The revised 1996 initial-eligibility standards, also referred to as Proposition 16, requires prospective student-athletes to earn at least a C average in 13 core high school classes. Under a sliding scale, those prospective student-athletes must also score at least 820 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Ben Wildavsky, Graduation blues, U.S. News & World Report, March 18, 2002, p. 70.

NCAA Action: The initial-eligibility standards was increased in core courses from 11 to 13 in 1996.

II. **Knights Commission Recommendation:** High school students should be ineligible for reimbursed campus visits or signing a national letter of intent⁵ until they show reasonable promise of being able to meet degree requirements.

NCAA Action: The membership adopted seven proposals between 1991 and 1997 related to proof of a prospect's academic credentials required before an official visit. The criteria for official visits included minimum standardized test scores and core courses. In 1997, in response to concerns expressed by the U.S. Justice Department, the membership eliminated the requirement that a student-athlete must achieve specific academic credentials to receive an official visit before the early signing period for the national letter of intent. The requirement to submit a test score and an academic transcript remains applicable.

III. **Knights Commission Recommendation:** Junior college transfers who did not meet NCAA initial eligibility requirements upon graduation from high school should sit out a year of completion after transfer.

NCAA Action: Division I has established more stringent transfer eligibility requirements for two-year college transfers students who did not satisfy initial-eligibility requirements on graduating from high school, particularly in football and men's basketball. These student-athletes must have completed 35 percent--versus the previous

⁵ The national letter of intent (NLI) is signed by prospective student-athletes announcing their decision to attend a particular institution. A student-athlete may appeal the terms and conditions of the national letter of intent at any time for any reason, such as a coaching change. The institution has the opportunity to respond to the appeal before it is heard by the National Letter of Intent NLI Steering Committee. Approximately 20,000 NLIs are signed each year by Division I and Division II institutions. The NLI Program receives 160 to 180 letter of intent appeals each year. The NLI Steering Committee approved 84 percent of the appeals in 1997, 90 percent of the appeals in 1998 and 92 percent of the appeals in 1999. If a student-athlete is not approved by the steering committee, they may file a second appeal with the NLI Appeals Committee. Since 1998, the NLI Appeals Committee has approved 50 percent of those appeals. "2000 NCAA Review of Principles Identified By The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics," [Electronic version], www.ncaa.org/enforcefrontF.html

standard of 25 percent--of their degree requirements to be immediately eligible in their third year of collegiate enrollment.

- The Division I Board of Directors approved legislation that requires all midyear transfers in men's and women's basketball to be ineligible until the ensuing academic year.
 - Transfer students are subject to continuing-eligibility requirements at the time of enrollment, specifically percentage-of-degree requirements.
- IV. **Knights Commission Recommendation:** The NCAA should study the feasibility of requiring that the range of academic abilities of incoming athletes approximates the range of abilities of the entire freshmen class.⁶

NCAA Action: NCAA rules dictate that academic standards and policies applicable to student-athletes must be consistent with those adopted by the institution for the student body in general or the NCAA's standards, whichever is higher.

- V. **Knights Commission Recommendation:** The letter of intent should serve the student as well as the athletic department.

NCAA Action: The National Letter of Intent Program is a voluntary program administered by the Collegiate Commissioners Association and is not governed by the NCAA. Student-athletes are permitted to appeal the terms and conditions of the letter of intent. During the 1999-2000 academic year, of the approximately 20,000 national letters of intent that were signed, 170 letters were appealed. Of those 170 letters, 86 percent were approved, 12 percent were given a partial release, and 2 percent were denied.⁷

- VI. **Knights Commission Recommendation:** Athletics scholarships should be offered for a five-year period.

⁶ A 1990 federal law requires universities to report graduation rates for full-time undergrads and for students on athletic scholarships. Among Division I schools, the graduation rate for student-athletes is 58 percent versus a 56 percent graduation rate for all students, according to the NCAA. The student-athlete graduation rate has not fluctuated greatly since Proposition 16 initial-eligibility requirements were implemented in 1996. Ben Wildavsky, "Graduation blues," *U.S. News & World Report*, March 18, 2002, p. 70.

⁷ 2000 NCAA Review.

NCAA Action: Since 1991, the NCAA's rules regarding the period for which student-athletes may receive financial aid have remained intact. Institutions are permitted to provide aid based to any degree on athletics ability for no more than a one-year period. This aid is renewable by the institution each year, but the institution can also decide not to renew the aid each year.

In 1999, the NCAA Division I Committee on Financial Aid recommended that the NCAA sponsor legislation to extend the time period for renewable grants-in-aid to exceed the one-year period. Neither the NCAA Division I Academics/Eligibility/Compliance Cabinet nor the NCAA Division I Student-Athlete Advisory Committee supported the proposal.

VII. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** Athletics eligibility should depend upon progress toward a degree.

NCAA Action: Academic satisfactory-progress legislation was adopted in 1991 and modified in 1992, 1993 and 1996. Progress toward a degree, grade point average minimums and core-completion requirements all have been enhanced.

VIII. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** Graduation rates of student-athletes should be a criterion for NCAA certification.

NCAA Action: The athletics certification process requires institutions to analyze the academic profile of entering student-athletes and student-athlete graduation rates. In the program's first five-year cycle from 1991-96, graduation rates of all athletes were compared with the student body. In the next certification cycle from 1997-2002, institutions were required to analyze all student-athletes whose performance is lower than other student-athletes.

Financial Integrity

- I. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** All funds raised and spent in connection with intercollegiate athletics programs will be channeled through the institution's general treasury. The athletics department budget will be developed and monitored in accordance with general budgeting procedures on campus.⁸

NCAA Action: No action taken. Individual institutional decision.

- II. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** Athletics costs must be reduced.

NCAA Action: Presidents are in control of the NCAA budget. All budget approval is performed by the Executive Committee or by presidential bodies of each division.

Budget subcommittees in each division are controlled by presidents. Attempts to control costs that were put into place in basketball resulted in an antitrust case and judgment against the NCAA that eventually was settled for \$54.5 million.⁹

⁸ At the University of Florida, the University Athletic Association (UAA), a non-profit corporation, handles athletic department financial issues. UAA maintains separate books, audits, budgets and funds from the university. UAA is not completely autonomous from the university since it is controlled by a board, including faculty and line administrators appointed by the university president. In addition, UAA's financial matters are reviewed by the university's vice-president for administration. The UAA projected budget for 2002-2003, approved in June of 2002, included projected revenues of \$48.9 million and projected expenses of \$48.7 million, an excess revenue of approximately \$180,000. UAA also has made annual contributions of up to \$1 million to the university in support of general university programs. The University of Florida maintains a booster organization, Gator Boosters Inc., which is under the control of the university president. Gator Boosters transfers all funds collected in excess of operating expenses to the UAA for student support or capital expenditures for the athletic program. Gator Boosters Inc. is strictly a fund-raising branch of UAA. John V. Lombardi, *A Model For Intercollegiate Athletics*, pp. 5-6; 2002-2003 Operating Budget Executive Summary, University Athletic Association, Inc., University of Florida, p. 2.

⁹ In January of 1989, the NCAA established a Cost Reduction Committee to find ways to reduce expenses in intercollegiate athletics. One of its proposals was to limit Division I basketball coaching staffs to four members, including an entry-level coach called a "restricted earnings coach" (REC). An addendum to that proposal limited the wages for the REC in all sports but football to \$12,000 during the school year and \$4,000 in summer months. The NCAA adopted the REC Proposal at its 1991 Convention and the REC Rule was put in place as of August 1, 1992. A group of restricted earnings coaches challenged the rule in *Law v. National Collegiate Athletic Association*, saying it was a violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act because it placed constraints on their income. A district court agreed with the coaches and ruled against the NCAA by saying the law restrained the coach's incomes and prohibiting the NCAA from enforcing the rule. When the NCAA appealed, a Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the decision. In 1995, the NCAA got rid of the REC Rule. In May of 1998, a federal judge awarded the REC plaintiffs \$67 million and in March of 1999, the NCAA and REC plaintiffs reached a \$54 million settlement. Doyice J. Cotten, John T. Wolohan, T. Jesse Wilde, *Law for Recreation and Sports Managers*, 2nd ed. (Kendell/Hunt Publishing Company, 2001); *The NCAA News* (December 20, 1999). NCAA Time line--1990-99; *The NCAA News* (January 13, 1997). NCAA Convention review.

III. **Knights Commission Recommendation:** Athletics grants-in-aid should cover the full cost of attendance for the very needy.¹⁰

NCAA Action: Changes in Division I financial aid legislation allow student-athletes to work during the academic year and earn additional money. The creation of programs such as the special assistance fund have helped address the issue of expenses for student-athletes with special financial needs. The Special Assistance Fund has increased from \$3 million in 1991 to \$10 million in 1998 to \$10.4 million in 2002.

IV. **Knights Commission Recommendation:** The independence of athletics foundations and booster clubs must be curbed.¹¹

NCAA Action: No action taken. Individual institutional decision.

V. **Knights Commission Recommendation:** The NCAA formula for sharing television revenues from the Division I men's basketball tournament must be reviewed by university presidents.

NCAA Action: In November 1999, the NCAA signed a \$6.2 billion, 11-year contract with CBS to televise the Division I men's basketball tournament and presidents were involved in the negotiations of the renewed television agreement. The NCAA Executive Committee approved the distribution formula from the basketball tournament in 2001. Presidential approval is required for all major commercial contracts with the NCAA

¹⁰ NCAA Bylaw 14.3 currently allows Division I or II student-athletes to receive a financial aid package, including tuition and fees, housing and books. Additional aid, such as Pell Grants, are also available. At its 1997 Convention, the NCAA passed a proposal allowing student-athletes to work during the academic year and earn up to the cost of attendance. But the NCAA has also maintained a strict policy on how much outside income student-athletes can earn. In 1984, the NCAA allowed certain student-athletes financial aid and a Pell Grant as long as the combined total did not exceed the value of their tuition and fees, housing and books, plus \$900. That total was increased to \$1,400 in 1988. However, in 1989, NCAA members defeated a proposal that would have increased Pell Grants in special circumstances. In 1991, the amount of financial aid in all Division I sports was reduced by 10 percent. In 1995, NCAA members defeated a proposal that would have allowed Division I student-athletes to earn up to \$1,500 in addition to their financial aid while employed during the school year.

¹¹ *A Model for Intercollegiate Athletics.*

VI. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** All athletics-related coaches' income should be reviewed and approved by the university.

NCAA Action: In 1992, Divisions I and II adopted Proposal No. 28, which required coaches to obtain prior written approval from the institution's chief executive officer for all athletically related income garnered from outside sources. That legislation was eliminated in 2000 as part of an NCAA deregulation effort.¹²

VII. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** Coaches should be offered long-term contracts.

NCAA Action: No action taken. Individual institutional decision.

VIII. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** Institutional support should be available for intercollegiate athletics.

NCAA Action: In Division I-A, institutional support, direct government support and student activity fees have increased as a percentage of total revenues from 14 percent in 1993 to 16 percent in 1997.

Certification

Athletics certification is a process where a university's athletic department is reviewed by an independent, outside peer group to determine if the university is complying with NCAA regulations. The certification program was approved at the 1993 NCAA Convention. The program was originally introduced in 1989 in a two-year test program. It began its first five-year cycle during the 1993-94 academic year when institutions were required to be certified every five years. When the second cycle

¹² In 1994, further legislation was passed requiring all athletic department staff members to receive that same approval. In 1995, the proposal was again modified to allow an institution's CEO to grant prior written approval for outside income not exceeding \$500 per event. In a University of Florida Coaching Contract drawn on March 21, 1990, a stipulation requires coaches to report all outside income to the University Athletic Association (UAA) prior to May 1 of each year. However, contracts on coaches outside income was removed at the 2000 NCAA Convention. *2000 NCAA Review*, p.12; David Pickle, *The NCAA News*. (May 7, 2001). [Electronic version]. Retrieved from <http://www.ncaa.org/news/2001/20010507/active/3810n02.html>

began in the 1999-2000 academic year, the certification process was required once every 10 years. However, institutions must still undergo a rules compliance evaluation once every three years. The certification program includes four areas: governance and commitment to rule compliance, academic issues, financial issues and gender equity and sportsmanship (NCAA Online, Division I Certification Program and The Purpose of Athletics Certification).

- I. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** The NCAA should adopt a certification program for all institutions granting athletics aid that would act independently authenticate the integrity of each institution's athletics program.

NCAA Action: Division I institutions must undergo NCAA certification of their athletics departments. Originally, the certification process was once every five years but has been extended to once every 10 years. Division II institutions, which also award athletics aid, have not adopted the certification program.

- II. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** Universities should undertake comprehensive, annual policy audits of their athletics programs.

NCAA Action: The NCAA certification program entails an annual compilation of athletics policy audits and other data.

- III. **Knight Commission Recommendation:** The certification program should include the major themes advanced by the Knight Commission (i.e., the "one-plus-three" model.)

NCAA Action: The NCAA certification program substantially incorporates the fundamental principles of the "one-plus-three" model. Four major components of athletics certification are governance and commitment to rules compliance; academic integrity; fiscal integrity; and equity, welfare and sportsmanship.

CHAPTER 6 KNIGHT COMMISSION: 1992-2001

The second and third Knight Commission reports were released one year apart in 1992 and 1993. *A Solid Start: A Report On Reform Of Intercollegiate Athletics* was released in March of 1992 and *A New Beginning For A New Century: Intercollegiate Athletics In The United States* was released in March of 1993. *A Solid Start* detailed the Knight Commission's work over its first year, including 20 specific recommendations, 10 of which were implemented by the NCAA President's Commission, a group of university presidents responsible for establishing reform measures to be voted on at annual NCAA conventions.

The Knight Commission underwent several membership changes by the second and third reports. By 1992, Lamar Alexander was replaced by R. Gerald Turner, chancellor from the University of Mississippi, when Alexander was appointed Secretary of Education by President George H. Bush in December of 1990.

In January of 1993, just prior to the release of the third Knight Commission report, President Bill Clinton appointed Knight Commission members Donna Shalala as Secretary of Health and Human Services and Clifton R. Wharton Jr. as Deputy Secretary of State. Shalala and Wharton resigned from the Knight Commission, leaving the commission with 20 members when its third report was issued in March of 1993, *A New Beginning For A New Century*.

That third report also contained the results of the second Louis Harris poll. The first Harris poll in 1989 found 78 percent of the American public thought college sports were

corrupt, but by the second Harris poll in 1993, 52 percent of the American public thought college sports were corrupt. “This significant 26-point decline represents how far college sports have come,” according to the third report, *A New Beginning For A New Century: Intercollegiate Athletics in the United States* (p. 3).

Following the release of the third report, the Knight Commission decided to disband because the NCAA was moving toward establishing a “one-plus-three” model the commission advocated in intercollegiate athletic policy. However, the Knight Commission reconvened in 1994, in part to discourage the NCAA from weakening recently-approved academic reform measures. The group remained active through the 1996 NCAA Convention in January of that year when the reform measure most closely tied to the Knight Commission--presidential control--was enacted by the NCAA. The NCAA made a dramatic change in its governing procedure following that convention when it put university presidents in control of the organization rather than athletic directors. The Knight Commission then agreed to disband in a January 11, 1996, letter Black sent to commission members:

While mindful that we don’t have a very good track record in our efforts to go out of business, Father Ted (Hesburgh), Bill (Friday) and I agreed that we should try again. Once this restructuring process is completed in 1997, presidential control--the central principle of our reform agenda--will be firmly established.

The commission did not disband permanently because in August of 2000, the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics decided to briefly reconvene to examine the progress of its reform suggestions and issue a fourth and final report detailing how it viewed the present intercollegiate athletic atmosphere.

As the 10th anniversary of the Commission’s first report in March 1991 approached, the members decided to reconvene for a fresh look at what has happened in this intervening decade and to assess the state of college athletics at the beginning of this new century. Had the situation improved or worsened? Were

there new problems that warranted attention. (Report of the Knight Foundation Commission, June 2001, p. 11)

“We weren’t going to reconvene after the first commission,” said Knight

Commission member Creed Black. “But as time passed, the problem was getting worse because the money involved was getting more substantial. So, we decided to see what was happening after 10 years. Our conclusion was that it was getting worse and needed to take more drastic steps” (C. Black, personal communication, June 3, 2002).

The fourth Knight Commission report, *A Call To Action: Reconnecting College Sports and Higher Education*, was released in June of 2001 following four hearings from August 28, 2000-January 22-23, 2001, with key players in the intercollegiate athletic reform movement, including NCAA officials, university presidents, university faculty, athletic directors, coaches, conference commissioners, student-athletes, athletic and higher education association officials and athletic sportswear officials. None of the individuals who testified before the 2001 Knight Commission testified before the earlier commission.

The Knight Commission reconvened with 28 members for that final report, including the following new members, who either replaced a member or were added as the commission expanded:

- Michael F. Adams, president of the University of Georgia;
- Hodding Carter III, president of the Knight Foundation;
- Carol A. Cartwright, president of Kent State University;
- Mary Sue Coleman, president of the University of Iowa;
- Cedric W. Dempsey, NCAA President;
- Adam W. Herbert, executive director of The Florida Center for Public Policy and Leadership;

- Stanley O. Ikenberry, president of the American Council on Education;
- Richard T. Ingram, president of the Association of Governing Boards.

Those individuals were joined by the Knight Commission members who had served on the commission during its first three reports from 1991-1993:

- Creed C. Black, former president, Knight Foundation
- Douglas S. Dibbert, president, General Alumni Association, University of North Carolina
- Dr. John A. DiBiaggio, president, Tufts University
- Dr. William C. Friday, co-chairman, president emeritus, University of North Carolina
- Dr. Thomas K. Hearn Jr., president, Wake Forest University
- Theodore M. Hesburgh, co-chairman, president emeritus, University of Notre Dame
- J. Lloyd Huck, trustee emeritus, The Pennsylvania State University
- Bryce Jordan, president emeritus, The Pennsylvania State University
- Richard W. Kazmaier, president, Kazmaier Associates
- Martin A. Massengale, president emeritus, University of Nebraska
- C. Thomas McMillen, former member of Congress
- Chase N. Peterson, president emeritus, University of Utah
- Jane C. Pfeiffer, former chair, NBC-Broadcasting
- Richard D. Schultz, former NCAA executive director
- R. Gerald Turner, president, Southern Methodist University
- LeRoy T. Walker, president emeritus, United States Olympic Committee
- James J. Whalen, president emeritus, Ithaca College
- Clifton R. Wharton Jr., former chairman and CEO, TIAA-CREF
- Charles E. Young, president, University of Florida.

In its fourth report, the Knight Commission spoke positively about the strides the commission had made since its inception, particularly in the measures the NCAA had adopted from the commission's recommendations. In analyzing the state of intercollegiate athletics at the start of the 21st century, the Knight Commission also emphasized that not enough was being done to reform intercollegiate athletics and that the situation had worsened rather than improved in the last 10 years since 1990. The commission also said the responsibility with reforming college sports does not lie with creating more NCAA rules, but rather with the individual key figures such as presidents, trustees and athletic directors taking more responsibility for what occurs at their institutions.

It is clear that good intentions and reform measures of recent years have not been enough . . . the threat has grown rather than diminished. More sweeping measures are imperative to halt the erosion of traditional educational values in college sports. The evidence strongly suggests that it is not enough simply to add new rules to the NCAA's copious rule book or ask presidents to carry the burden alone. (Report of the Knight Foundation Commission, June 2001, p. 11)

In that fourth report, the Knight Commission presented a revised "one-plus-three" model by proposing the creation of a Coalition of Presidents, a group of presidents compiled from the NCAA, Division I-A conferences, the American Council on Education and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. In the revised "one-plus-three" model, the Coalition of Presidents would oversee an agenda of academic reform, a decrease in athletic expenditures and less reliance on commercial sponsorships (Report of the Knight Foundation Commission, June 2001).

These are some of the Knight Commission major proposals for the agenda of the Coalition of Presidents from *A Call To Action: Reconnecting College Sports and Higher Education* (pp. 26-28):

Academics

- Athletes should be held to the same standards as other students, including criteria for admission, academic support services, choice of major, and making satisfactory progress toward a degree.
- Graduation rates must improve. By 2007, teams that do not graduate at least 50 percent of their players should not be eligible for conference championships or for postseason play.
- The NBA and the NFL should be encouraged to develop minor leagues so that athletes not interested in undergraduate study are provided an alternative route to professional careers.

Decrease in Athletic Expenditures

- Reduce expenditures in big-time sports such as football and basketball. This includes a reduction in the total number of scholarships that may be awarded in Division I-A football.
- Ensure that the legitimate and long-overdue need to support women's athletic programs and comply with Title IX is not used as an excuse for soaring costs while expenses in big-time sports are unchecked.
- Require that agreements for coaches' outside income be negotiated with institutions, not individual coaches.
- Revise the plan for distribution of revenue from the NCAA contract with CBS for broadcasting rights to the NCAA men's basketball tournament. That revenue-sharing plan should not be based on a team's won-loss record, but should figure in other things such as graduation rates.

Less Reliance on Commercial Sponsorships

- Insist that institutions alone should determine when games are played, how they are broadcast, and which companies are permitted to use their athletic contests as advertising vehicles.
- Encourage institutions to reconsider all sports-related commercial contracts as to whether they are appropriate in an academic setting.
- Support federal legislation to ban legal gambling on college sports in the state of Nevada and encourage college presidents to address illegal gambling on their campuses.

Shortly after the Knight Commission released its fourth report in the summer of 2001, critics began attacking some of those reform recommendations even more harshly

than in the first three reports. In the August 12, 2000, edition of *The Bradenton Herald*, national political commentator George Will said, “the commission’s ‘culture war’ approach to reforming college athletics is unconvincing” (Will, 2002, p. 13c). Author Andrew Zimbalist, who teaches economics at Smith College (R.I.) and has written extensively on sports business issues, criticized the fourth report even though he testified in one of the four hearings before the Knight Commission issued the fourth report. Writing in *The Final Word* column for the July 16-22, 2001, edition of *Street & Smith’s SportsBusiness Journal*, Zimbalist said:

The present Knight report produces a long laundry list of possible reforms. None of these ideas are new, but many are worthy. Yet with 25 people on the Knight Commission, the inevitable compromises yielded too many half-baked proposals. (Zimbalist, 2001, p. 46)

In the January 8-14, 2001, edition of *Street & Smith’s SportsBusiness Journal*, former professional basketball player and TV commentator Len Elmore attacked the Knight Commission proposal to create developmental leagues in professional football and basketball for aspiring players uncommitted to the academic demands of being in college as targeting African-Americans.

The skeptics among us, including some prominent college basketball coaches, believe that the Knight Commission’s views reflect a sinister plot that would rid the college game of troublesome black athletes who appear merely to use the system for their own gain. To them, these kids, with their scandals and purported academic deficiencies, are a drain on the institutions and a blot on the good name of intercollegiate sports. This school of thought continues that the commission believes college basketball doesn’t need these kids and would be better off without them. (Elmore, 2001, p. 30)

Elmore said the Knight Commission took a hypocritical stance, particularly since some of the institutions of Knight Commission members admit the same type of players that they encourage not to come to college.

However, the report from reconvened Knight Commission in 2001 has also been cited in two 2002 special sections pertaining to intercollegiate athletic reform, particularly the strong stance the commission took on the academic performance of student-athletes. In the inaugural issue of *U.S. News & World Report's* "America's Best College Sports Programs," the Knight Commission's Maureen Devlin was quoted as saying a perception was that the large amounts of money involved in college sports had forced institutions into a competition to make more money. She said the only way to break that perception was for institutions to halt their need to cut back on expenses (LaGessee, 2002).

In an October 18, 2002, feature in *USA Today* on the graduation rates of student-athletes as measured against the male population of an institution, it was said "The blue-ribbon Knight Commission pulled no punches." The story mentioned the commission's specific recommendations on holding student-athletes to the same admissions criteria as the rest of the student body; of reducing the length of sports seasons and of barring any institution from conference championships and postseason play that does not have at least a 50 percent graduation rate for student-athletes by 2007.

Disbandment of Knight Commission

In a letter to Dr. W. Gerald Austen, chairman of the board of trustees of the Knight Foundation, at the beginning of the fourth report, Knight Commission co-chairman Dr. William C. Friday and Father Theodore M. Hesburgh recommended that the Knight Commission disband if the Coalition of Presidents can be created. They further recommended that the Knight Foundation offer matching grants to the Coalition of Presidents and American Council on Education to help continue reform efforts in

intercollegiate athletics. They also recommended the creation of the Institute for Intercollegiate Athletics to promote a reform agenda for intercollegiate athletics.

One Knight Commission member was still uncertain that the commission might still reconvene someday.

“I’ll never say never because we thought we were out of business a couple of times before,” Creed Black said. “When we see the opportunity to give support, that’s the most important thing” (C. Black, personal communication, June 3, 2002).

For purposes of analyzing the contributions of the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for this research, the commission’s work will be divided into two time periods:

- 1) The “early” Knight Commission--comprising the first three reports of 1991, 1992 and 1993;
- 2) The “reconvened” Knight Commission--comprising the 2001 report after the commission reconvened in 2000.

Knight Commission members interviewed for this research said the “early” Knight Commission reports made more noteworthy accomplishments in reforming college sports than did the “reconvened” commission.

“I think the first commission fared better than the second,” Dr. Charles Young said. “Having served on both -- this last one didn’t go as well in my view in its meetings, discussions and couldn’t come to conclusions as easily or with as much consensus as the first commission did. Its recommendations were not as precise and not as understandable and not as readily accepted by the public as the first commission. If you rank the two, I would rank the first as much better” (C. Young, personal communication, June 19, 2002).

Other Knight Commission members specifically pointed to several reform measures offered by the commission that were later adopted by the NCAA, such as the

change in the NCAA's hierarchy in 1996, as reasons for why the "early" Knight Commission was more successful in its reform efforts than the "reconvened" commission.

"Certainly in the first report, you'd have to say it was a resounding success," Dr. Thomas Hearn said. "Its recommendations were almost entirely adopted by the NCAA, including the restructuring of the organization itself. There were other forces at work. I don't mean to suggest it was the Knight Commission's work alone, but the Knight Commission certainly was an important player" (T. Hearn, personal communication, June 25, 2002).

"For an outside group like that to do something and really get positive response to it, to have some weight to it and move forward, I think it was really very successful," Richard Schultz said. "It was a lot more successful at the time than anticipated" (R. Schultz, personal communication, June 18, 2002).

Knight Commission co-chairman Dr. William C. Friday cited as examples Knight Commission members who were asked to speak nationally on intercollegiate athletic reform issues just after the first report was released in 1991 as evidence of the commission's popularity.

"They wanted the credibility of the Knight Commission," Friday said. "The Knight Commission voice is the one that has stood out there, and I think it was a great success" (W. Friday, personal communication, June 11, 2002).

"The Knight Commission wasn't trying to blow the system up and I think in its time, the Knight Commission played a very important role," said Knight Commission member Thomas McMillen. "But reform is always driven by some kind of outrage. And

it will take some sort of scandal -- whether gambling or anything else -- to really restructure the system” (T. McMillen, personal communication, June 21, 2002).

However, it is unfair to compare the two periods of the Knight Commission since the commission had different agendas during both junctures. The “early” and “reconvened” commissions drew up recommendations based on what it perceived as the major problems facing intercollegiate athletics during both periods -- the beginning of the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century. The “early” commission was predicated more on putting presidents in charge of college sports. It achieved that goal when the NCAA was restructured in 1997.

The “reconvened” commission was driven more by the disillusionment it held that there was not more progress made on many of its other recommendations from the first three reports, particularly concerning graduation rates and the increasing expenses in athletic departments. In an introductory letter at the beginning of the fourth report, commission co-chairmen Dr. William C. Friday and Theodore M. Hesburgh said, “We find that the problems of big-time college sports have grown rather than diminished” (Report of the Knight Foundation Commission, June 2001, p. 4).

However, the "reconvened" Knight Commission did not consider its work unsuccessful. The commission decided to reconvene to analyze what had transpired since issuing its first report 10 years earlier in 1991. There were several positive steps that the commission could point to as evidence that its reform agenda was making progress.

The NCAA had been restructured to give university presidents voting control on all legislation. University presidents also had stronger control of athletic department

finances. Between 1989 and 1993, there was a 26-point decline in the percentage of the general public that viewed college sports as being corrupt.

But the "reconvened" commission was not oblivious to the problems still facing collegiate athletics. Student-athlete graduation rates were still lower than that of the general student population at many institutions. At more than 100 of the 300-plus Division I-A institutions, athletic department expenses were greater than revenues.

The commission decided that enacting even more recommendations for the NCAA to consider was not the solution. In the commission's fourth and final report, the group worked more toward an agenda of putting the responsibility for reforming college athletics in the hands of the individual institutions..

Consider some of these specific recommendations by the "reconvened commission":

- Student-athletes should be treated no differently than the rest of the student population. For example, if all students must maintain a 2.0 grade point average, a student-athlete should have to maintain the same minimum GPA.
- Coaches must have institutional approval for all outside income.
- Individual institutions rather than athletic conferences or the NCAA should have the final approval on the times for all athletic events.
- Encourage institutions to enforce a stricter policy on sponsorships to reflect the main goals of an institution as being academically-based.

The commission even revised its primary "one-plus-three" model to have university presidents oversee a reform agenda of academic integrity, a reduction in athletic department finances and less reliance on corporate sponsorships. "Sports as big business for colleges and universities is in direct conflict with nearly every value that should matter for higher education," the commission said in the fourth report, *A Call To Action* (Report of the Knight Foundation Commission, June 2001, p. 21).

In comparing the work of the "early" commission and the "reconvened" commission, several individuals with connections to intercollegiate athletics said the "early" commission had more success in implementing its recommendations.

- Member Dr. Charles Young said the "early" commission was able to build more of a consensus of agreement among members on an agenda and offered more precise recommendations. (C. Young, personal communication, June 19, 2002)
- Another member, Richard Schultz, said the NCAA was not as receptive of the "reconvened" commission because there was a perception by the NCAA that the commission was interfering in the recommendations it was offering. Athletic directors in particular said the commission was out of touch with its recommendations. (R. Schultz, personal communication, June 18, 2002)

Sports economist Andrew Zimbalist said the "reconvened" commission did not offer any new recommendations from its earlier reports and may have suffered from the commission being too large (Zimbalist, 2001).

The final proposal from the "reconvened" Knight Commission was the creation of Coalition of Presidents, funded by the Knight Foundation and comprised of university presidents, to ensure institutions are complying with NCAA regulations. The commission also proposed creating an Institute for Intercollegiate Athletics to take the role of the commission and monitor the issues affecting intercollegiate athletics. If that system could be implemented, the commission recommended to the Knight Foundation Board of Trustees that the commission permanently disband.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

When analyzing the history of collegiate athletic reform commissions, a common theme has been the strong public support these commissions have initially received. However, not all athletic commissions have been able to permanently implement their reform agendas. *In Games Colleges Play: Scandal and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics*, author John R. Thelin said, “The reforms put into place have only an incidental connection with the original intent of the report’s authors and advocates” (Thelin, 1996, p. 11).

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching questioned what it perceived as an overemphasis on college sports in higher education as far back as the 1920s. Those same beliefs were also offered in the 1990s by the most recent collegiate athletic reform group, the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact the Knight Commission played in reforming intercollegiate athletic policy from 1989-2001. The Knight Commission was funded solely by the Knight Foundation, a charitable organization that, while independent of the Knight-Ridder Inc. media chain, focused many of its resources on improving journalism programs worldwide. Since the Knight Commission was primarily active from 1989-1993 and from 2000-2001, six members of the commission who served during each of those time periods were interviewed in person or by phone because they served throughout the commission’s entirety.

Summary of Research Question Findings

- 1) How did a journalism-based charitable foundation dedicated to protecting the First Amendment rights of free speech decide to become involved in collegiate athletic reform?

The Knight Foundation's goal of improving journalism programs fell under its main mission of addressing and offering solutions to higher education issues.

Intercollegiate athletics fell under that mission as well. Several Knight Foundation members who were also university presidents in the late 1980s prior to the formation of the Knight Commission were concerned about the increasing role of intercollegiate athletics in higher education, and they thought the best way to address many of the topics that concerned them would be to form a commission focusing on collegiate sports and ways to address many of its problems.

- 2) How did the commission report its findings to the public, and did the commission use its connections to a media conglomerate such as Knight-Ridder Inc., to sway public opinion--through the media--about its findings?

The Knight Commission hired, a New York City-based public relations firm, Hill & Knowlton, to promote the release of the commission's first three reports. The Knight Commission also funded a 1991 documentary that aired on the Public Broadcasting Stations (PBS) and was produced by Public Affairs Television pioneer Bill Moyers pertaining to the issues affecting intercollegiate athletics; the documentary was released simultaneously with the first report. The commission also used the public polling organization, Louis Harris & Associates, to conduct polls about the public's perception of intercollegiate athletics.

While Knight-Ridder newspapers covered the Knight Commission, particularly following the release of the first report, the coverage was not dictated by the Knight Commission's affiliation with the Knight Foundation. At least one Knight Commission

member was disappointed in Knight-Ridder's coverage of the commission and said the coverage did not sway public opinion.

- 3) How were the actions and recommendations of the Knight Commission viewed by the academic and athletic community, including administrators, faculty, coaches and athletic directors?

The Knight Commission received support from parts of the academic community. Texas A&M University formed a Knight Commission Task Force of students, alumni and administrators in 1992 to study the school's compliance with the Knight Commission report. The University of Nevada at Las Vegas created a smaller version of the Knight Commission report to examine the relationship between academics and athletics at the school. The University of North Carolina, University of Pittsburgh, Southern Methodist University and the presidents of Virginia's public universities passed resolutions supporting the Knight Commission's work following the release of the first report in 1991.

Faculty were skeptical of the Knight Commission because they were unsure that the group could initiate its reform measures, according to commission member Dr. William Friday. The athletic community, however, was not as apathetic toward the Knight Commission. Coaches, in particular the ones who testified before the commission, were enthused about being part of dialogue to reform college sports. Basketball coaches Bobby Knight and "Digger" Phelps said they had never sat down with university presidents to discuss the issues facing intercollegiate athletics prior to being invited to testify before the Knight Commission.

- 4) What has been the NCAA's response to the Knight Commission's work?

By 1993, nearly two-thirds of the Knight Commission recommendations had been endorsed by the NCAA; with 10 of the original 20 recommendations developed into

some type of NCAA legislation. The most noteworthy recommendation of having university presidents control the NCAA occurred in 1996 when the NCAA was restructured and a small group of presidents became the only voting members of the organization (prior to 1996, each of the more than 300 Division I-A institution was allowed one vote). The two NCAA executive directors who served from during the time period from 1987-2002 also served on the Knight Commission. The presidential control of the NCAA was one of the Knight Commission's original reform proposals. "The NCAA was very supportive of the Knight Commission the first time," said commission member Richard Schultz. "The second time ... it just didn't seem to be as well-received. I think there was the feeling the Knight Commission was interfering, and I think some of the ADs felt (the Knight Commission) was out of touch in some of the things they were proposing" (R. Schultz, personal communication, June 18, 2002).

- 5) How do members of the Knight Commission evaluate the success of the group's work?

Members were positive about the commission's accomplishments, particularly in bringing presidential control over the NCAA. Most members interviewed said the work of the "early" commission from 1989-93 was more significant than when the commission reconvened in 2000 because the "early" commission offered more specific reform measures and received more favorable public reception than did the latter group. An important area to consider was the professional status of commission members during the "early" commission from 1990-93 and the "reconvened" commission in 2000. When the Knight Commission released its first report in March of 1991, three members were considered "emeritus" status at their institutions. When the commission released its last report in the summer of 2001, 12 members were either considered "emeritus" status or no

longer held the job status they had during the “early” commission. It could be suggested that since some of these members were no longer in a position where they could affect athletic agendas at either their institution or nationally, the “reconvened” commission’s influence was not as strong as that of the “early” commission.

Future Research

The researcher interviewed six of the 22 members who served on the Knight Commission throughout its entirety from 1989-2001. If a larger number of commission members were interviewed, a more complete portrayal of the feelings of commission members when building the agendas for each of the four reports could be developed. Negative feelings about any agenda must be included to determine how much division or debate, if any, there were among commission members.

The future of the Knight Commission’s proposed Coalition of Presidents and Institute for Intercollegiate Athletics should be followed closely. The Knight Commission proposed that the Knight Foundation help fund both of those groups. However, as of the fall of 2002, the Knight Foundation had not made a decision on the funding. The proposed Coalition of Presidents would be drawn from university presidents and trustees, as well as officials from the NCAA, American Council on Education and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. The Knight Commission proposal is that the Coalition of Presidents be independent of the NCAA and athletic conferences. The Institute for Intercollegiate Athletics would serve “as a watchdog to maintain pressure for change,” according to the Knight Commission’s 2001 report, *A Call To Action: Reconnecting College Sports and Higher Education*. Since the Knight Commission disbanded following the 2001 report, any future Knight Commission movement would come from the possible formation of an Institute for Intercollegiate

Athletics. The status of the Institute for Intercollegiate Athletics should be closely watched to determine if it will be created, particularly if any Knight Commission members join the group.

Another area of future research pertaining to the Knight Commission could be a case study of an individual institution or a conference to determine if it implemented any of the commission's recommendations and what occurred once those changes were implemented. For example, former University of Florida president John Lombardi wrote a 1992 article, *A Model for Intercollegiate Athletics*, for The Journal of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities & Colleges. In that piece, he outlined how the University of Florida had implemented some of the Knight Commission recommendations from the commission's first report in 1991. Lombardi cited examples of how UF-affiliated organizations such as the University Athletic Association (UAA) and Gator Boosters Inc. operate independent budgets from the university but still must have those budgets approved through the university. He cited other examples in a standard UF Coaching Contract that include stipulations for each coach to report outside income to the university and an incentive clause awarding a coach for graduating a certain percentage of players (Lombardi, 1992).

The release of the Knight Commission executive sessions on January 1, 2004, could also offer a new perspective on the commission's work and how it formed its agendas for each of its four reports. The executive sessions were closed to the public and media--these meetings are where the directions for each of the reports were debated among commission members. The unsealing of these executive sessions could reveal

which of the issues were debated the most among commission members and what was the consensus among the entire commission on each of the reports.

From a media analysis of the Knight Commission, further research could include analyzing the commission's relationship with the media, particularly the Knight-Ridder Inc. newspaper organization. Knight-Ridder officials could be contacted to determine if they felt "pressured" to cover the work of a Knight Foundation-funded group. Individual Knight-Ridder writers who covered the Knight Commission could be contacted to determine if they also felt "pressured" to write positive stories on the commission because of the Knight connection. A content analysis could include evaluating whether the sports, news or editorial sections of a newspaper covered the Knight Commission the most – and which section was the most critical in its comments about the commission. A possible question in any media-related analysis of the Knight Commission would be whether the media holds apathetic views to athletic reform groups in general because historically these groups have not been able to sustain permanent reform agendas.

Analysis

The Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics was formed primarily in response to the myriad of college athletic scandals in the 1980s when 109 higher education institutions committed some type of NCAA violation during that period, including more than half of the 106 Division I-A institutions, the NCAA's highest level.

A group of individuals with connections to higher education issues, such as Creed Black, Dr. William C. Friday and Father Theodore Hesburgh, were concerned about the state of college athletics. Graduation rates for some student-athletes were declining. Booster groups were becoming more influential on campuses. Athletic departments were

encountering financial difficulties--even while still attempting to upgrade athletic facilities.

By creating a commission to study and offer solutions for reforming college athletics, Black, Friday and Hesburgh hoped to reduce some of the problems plaguing intercollegiate sports. Black and Friday provided the impetus for starting the Knight Commission in the late 1980s. At that time, Friday was president and co-chair of the William R. Kenan Jr. Fund at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Black had just become president in 1988 of the Knight Foundation, a charitable organization with ties to the Knight-Ridder publishing family. However, both men had experience in intercollegiate athletic policy.

Black was publisher of the *Lexington Herald-Leader* in 1985 when the newspaper ran a series of stories about a scandal involving the hometown University of Kentucky men's basketball players accepting illegal cash payments from school booster club members and alumni. The series generated controversy for the newspaper, which received death threats, however, the writers of the series were also awarded a Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting.

Black solicited support from university presidents and presidents and chief executive officers of public and private organizations in building support for forming an athletics commission. He was also influential in helping persuade the Knight Foundation to donate \$2 million to create the Knight Commission.

Friday and Hesburgh were chosen as co-chairmen of the commission. That was one of several strategic moves in the early life of the commission. With Friday being president emeritus of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and Hesburgh being

president emeritus of the University of Notre Dame, both men were coming from institutions able to balance highly acclaimed academic and athletic programs.

Some of the other strategic moves by the commission included:

- Choosing someone such as Bill Moyers to lend credibility to the commission's findings. Moyers, who established Public Affairs Television in 1986 and is revered for his journalistic and cultural programs, produced a Knight Foundation-funded documentary coinciding with the release of the commission's first report in March of 1991.
- Inviting an array of well-known coaches such as Bobby Knight, Dean Smith, Joe Paterno and Tom Osbourne to testify during one of its five hearings in preparation for the first report.
- Retaining a New York City-based public relations firm, Hill & Knowlton Inc., to promote the commission's findings.
- Establishing a strong, working relationship with the NCAA. The Knight Commission did not have authority to legislate its reform agenda--it was only offering recommendations. To compensate for that lack of power, the commission specifically chose members who were key figures in college sports, particularly university presidents. These presidents maintained close connections to the NCAA -- several served on the now-defunct NCAA President's Commissions--and aided in promoting the Knight Commission's agenda.
- Maintaining that working relationship with the NCAA by including NCAA Executive Directors Richard Schultz and Cedric Dempsey, who each served during the Knight Commission's active period from 1989-2001, as Knight Commission members. Schultz was the commission's first appointee in 1989.

That working relationship with the NCAA continued throughout the 1990s. Among the commission's first 20 recommendations from its first report in 1991, 10 were adopted in some form by the NCAA.

Some of the most noteworthy Knight Commission recommendations were:

- Presidential control of the NCAA. This was an historic shift in power in the NCAA in 1996 when the organization went from a one vote per institution system in which more than 900 institutions cast votes, to a new system that included an Executive Committee of 20 university presidents or chancellors. NCAA voting would be relegated to this group of presidents and chancellors, each serving a three-year term. No longer would each institution have its own vote. This shift in power put presidents in control of all NCAA legislation. It also allowed the presidents to

approve all funding for their individual institutions on all athletic department matters, which was another Knight Commission recommendation.

- Increasing the minimum entrance requirements for prospective student-athletes from 11 to 13 high school core classes, while also increasing the minimum grade point average and national standardized test scores. All those were accomplished with the implementation of Proposition 16 in 1993.
- Requiring student-athletes to make satisfactory progress each academic year toward a degree in order to maintain eligibility. The NCAA adopted this in 1991 and strengthened those requirements in 1992, 1993 and 1996.

In analyzing the Knight Commission, it is also important to remember that the commission had two active periods--the "early" commission when the first three reports were released in 1991, 1992 and 1993 and the "reconvened" commission when the final report was issued in 2001. Several commission members cited the accomplishments of the "early" commission as being more noteworthy than the "reconvened" commission. Most of the commission's most publicized recommendations--presidential control of the NCAA and over institutional athletic department finances and a strengthening of academic requirements for incoming student-athletes came out of that first report. However, the "reconvened" commission appeared to focus more on strengthening its original recommendations from the first report in 1991 rather than adding a large amount of new recommendations.

One of the strengths of the Knight Commission was its access to a wealthy, charitable group such as the Knight Foundation. The Knight Foundation funded the Knight Commission with an original \$2 million donation. This multi-million donation allowed the commission to open an office in Charlotte, N.C., and to bring in an array of important intercollegiate athletic figures to testify during its hearings.

The commission was also well-conceived in the way it selected members. It included university presidents from the major athletic conferences from different

geographic regions of the country. Its membership also included individuals from public and private corporations and aligned itself closely with the NCAA by including NCAA executive directors as members.

The Knight Commission was responsible for bringing about numerous intercollegiate athletic reform measures--restructuring the NCAA, tightening academic requirements for student-athletes and keeping a closer monitor on athletic department expenses. The commission has gained such notoriety that it is often mentioned in articles pertaining to collegiate athletic reform, such as 2002 special sections appearing in *U.S. News & World Report* and *USA Today*.

In analyzing the Knight Commission's weaknesses, it did not go far enough in its reform efforts since many of the problems facing college sports in 2002 are the same problems the commission faced when it was created in 1989. Graduation rates for student-athletes are still lower than that of the overall student population --in many cases by as much as 30 to 40 percent. Many institutions are still driven by how they can outspend their competitors in improving athletic facilities. Since 2001, major institutions such as the University of Alabama, University of Kentucky and University of Michigan have all admitted to committing NCAA violations in football or men's basketball.

However, there is more academic and financial integrity in college sports because of the Knight Commission. The commission has made it easier for institutions to monitor their athletic departments. The final decision on athletic matters now goes through university presidents. There is no longer a chaotic voting system with varying agendas in the NCAA. Academic requirements have been strengthened. The Knight Commission

deserves much of this credit for helping bringing about meaningful reforms such as these in college athletics.

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Marino covered college and high school athletics for more than 15 years as a prep/general assignment newspaper reporter for the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* and *The Bradenton Herald* on Florida's southwest coast. He also has also written for team publications *Die Hard* and *GatorBait*, as well as the Associated Press, *The Tampa Tribune*, *St.Petersburg Times*, *Lakeland Ledger*, *Gainesville Sun*, and *The Miami Herald*.

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