



Verbatim comments
NCAA Division I leaders survey
July 29-August 22, 2025

Nearly 300 survey respondents added comments on this question:
“What is the single most significant issue to address in college sports?”

Top recurring themes of the responses

- Athlete Education/Academics: 28 mentions
- Transfer Portal/Mobility: 23 mentions
- Rules/Enforcement/NCAA Governance: 23 mentions
- NIL/Compensation: 21 mentions
- Amateurism vs. Pro Model: 15 mentions
- Conference Realignment/Media Money: 9 mentions
- Gambling/Integrity/Officiating: 8 mentions
- Academics vs. Athletics Balance/Values: 7 mentions
- Coaching/Contracts/Buyouts: 6 mentions
- Recruiting/Tampering/High School Pipeline: 5 mentions

Key Insights

- Governance and NCAA rules were cited repeatedly, with concerns about inconsistent enforcement, lack of clarity, and the widening gap between “haves” and “have-nots.”
- NIL/Compensation and the transfer portal were strongly linked in the minds of respondents. Many emphasized the unsustainability of the current free-agency style model without national standards or guardrails.
- Academics and the “student” in “student-athlete” remain a central concern. Respondents worry about erosion of educational priorities and declining graduation outcomes.
- College athletes’ health and safety (including mental health) were highlighted in relation to increased travel, workload and stress from instability in the system.
- The financial model of college athletics—particularly at the mid-major level—was seen as unsustainable, with escalating costs and reliance on a shrinking pool of students.
- Several called for leadership, vision and segmentation: distinguishing between commercialized revenue sports and the broader educational mission of athletics.

Selected verbatim responses:

“What is the single most significant issue to address in college sports?”

- College sports are essentially becoming a version of professional sports. I fear college athletics may be coming to an end.
- *Faculty Athletics Representative*
- The NIL and Transfer Portal are jokes and are destroying college athletics. The most important issue is that the NCAA is ineffective, out of touch and only listens to the Power 4/5
- *President/Chancellor*
- College athletics needs real leaders. Campus presidents and ADs turn over too fast and have too much self-interest to preserve the best interest of college sports at large. We need leaders who will look out for the greater good of college sports, and will be respected by presidents, ADs, administrators, coaches, student-athletes, and fans.
- *Director of Athletics*
- The fully open nature of the portal is creating a challenging marketplace for college athletics, where many athletes in the revenue sports can make more than they would in professional athletics. It also discourages (and might punish) a focus on athlete development... Right now it is total Wild West, and making athletics economically unsustainable for all but those who are well-monied among the A4 conferences.
- *President/Chancellor*
- The ability for student-athletes to transfer whenever and wherever they want, with no accountability is not healthy for college athletics or the student-athlete. While I believe that student-athletes should have the ability to transfer at least one time, there needs to be a cap on the number of times they can transfer and when. Additionally, we need to get conferences (especially those below the P4) to aggregate their resources and formulate more regionality. Creating regionality and regional scheduling models will save money, increase revenue opportunities, but more importantly, will lessen the travel burden and increase the health and well-being for our student-athletes, coaches and staffs.
- *Director of Athletics*
- For too many, the transfer phenomenon makes it so much easier to lose focus on academics, particularly for student-athletes who aren't going to make a career out of their sport. Transferring multiple times with no intention of graduation (or even expectation of it) has made 'college' athletics look like an oxymoron. As has graduate students who take 6 credits towards a degree they are never going to finish just so they can play one more season. It is just too obvious now.
- *Faculty Athletics Representative*

- Being able to transfer every year is a larger problem than revenue sharing or NIL. It would be reasonable to allow a student to transfer one time in his/her collegiate career without penalty but after that, they would sit a year. State high school associations and even Little League are able to enforce transfer rules so I don't understand why the NCAA cannot and why the courts are getting involved.
- *Senior Woman Administrator*
- It is clear that FBS and basketball monetization can still be realized to benefit the entire collegiate athletics enterprise (both revenue sports and Olympic sports). Presently, the playing field is not level (conferences and their control of the markets are inherently not balanced, CFP revenues are not balanced, the portal timing is not working and there are real issues with tampering)... There is so much uncertainty and variability in the system by institution, conference, state, and sport. The lack of a cohesive national strategy with oversight and control measures that balances monetization that should support FBS and MBB and WBB with more fair revenue distributions while ensuring that student athletes are kept healthy, prepared for their future, and successful graduates needs to be figured out.
- *President/Chancellor*
- The resource gap is only growing and forcing poor decisions for a large number of institutions who cannot afford them but there is also no reasonable "off ramp" either. Conference bylaws, House damages requirements and the time necessary to make change one institution at a time makes it an almost impossible decision. We need critical mass to agree to a change and then with that group, move to a healthier place.
- *Director of Athletics*
- The current financial environment in Division I college athletics is unsustainable. The playing field between schools in the SEC and Big 10 is becoming more uneven.
- *Faculty Athletics Representative*
- The overall NCAA/Institutions of Higher Education landscape is increasingly without any passion for values tied to the greater academic mission of higher education (at its own peril). Mid-major conferences that have strength, great tradition and longevity are filled with institutions who are grappling with athletic budgets. If everybody describes athletics as the "wild west" it's time for the NCAA and college leaders to develop the framework for success going forward. This pathway is not sustainable and is resulting in a very volatile environment with no predictability.
- *President/Chancellor*

- The combination of the transfer portal/NIL Revenue Sharing is a deadly combination for mid-majors and is going to threaten a lot of mid-majors ability to stay Division I. We have all become a farm system for the next highest level to recruit right off of each other's rosters. At some point this will have a negative effect on graduation rates, academic performance. Fan interest and engagement, outside of the Power 4, will decline if rosters turn over annually. Other employees on college campuses, including those who work in athletics, will also become disenchanting when some of the athletes' salaries are higher than theirs. It is not a sustainable model at the moment.

- *Director of Athletics*
- The focus on college sports as big business, particularly as it pertains to football and other revenue sports, is obliterating any focus on academic success for athletes and on the Olympic sports. Olympic sports are being (or will be) decimated by the demand for funds to support the revenue sports, at the expense of women and those men in non-revenue sports.

- *Faculty Athletics Representative*
- As athletes are already on our campuses, partner with all Olympic sport organizations to remove prize limits, streamline long term athlete development and create NIL opportunities.

- *Faculty Athletics Representative*
- The term college sports means that athletes are both attending college and competing in a sport. The NCAA has long emphasized this balance by calling them "student-athletes." However, current transfer portal rules and direct payments to athletes are shifting the focus away from academics and degree completion, placing greater emphasis on athletics.

- *Faculty Athletics Representative*
- I think if a student-athlete wants to transfer, then they should be able to do so. The issue is if they are transferring due to the money (NIL or revenue sharing reasons) and hop around as a result. I think the main problem of the transfer portal is actually due to the coaches who abuse it and run student-athletes off at their current institution. The NCAA needs to address this issue.

- *Senior Woman Administrator*
- Spending needs with being boxed in with roster caps at a time that we in the first year of the demographic enrollment cliff. There will be nearly a million less 18 year olds for schools to enroll from by 2035, literally hundreds of schools will close and our bills are going up while at the same time our ability to aid campus enrollment is being negated.

- *Director of Athletics*

- The whole enterprise is being tainted and jeopardized by money and power. Sports should give students access to higher education and to opportunities to compete and develop as human beings. I'm not opposed to paying athletes reasonable amounts in sports that generate a net profit for universities. But most D1 institutions lose money on sports.
- *Faculty Athletics Representative*
- Graduation does not seem to be the goal anymore, especially in revenue or marquee sports, but institutions are being held to NCAA academic standards that don't match the reality of what happens on campuses in terms of frequent-transfer students or students who otherwise aren't retained.
- *Senior Woman Administrator*
- A college athlete must be a student in good standing. Once we lose the academic piece then we have lost the mission of the University and athletics are no longer part of the University.
- *Faculty Athletics Representative*
- We are treated like a business in the courts, but yet we are mandated by the federal government to offer equal opportunities (which I agree with, the equal opportunities). These two things are at odds with each other.
- *Director of Athletics*
- Really - we (NCAA member institutions, collectively) don't have the legal authority to make ANY rules at the moment. Until we get to collective bargaining, this is all just abstract thinking.
- *Faculty Athletics Representative*
- The Power 4 (really 2) are calling all of the shots. Everyone knows this. We need to find a way to break off the Power 2 FBS football from everything else. Then we can move to stabilize NCAA Div I.
- *Faculty Athletics Representative*
- Let the P4 make their own league and let the rest of us go on our own with STUDENT-athletes. Let them be the minor league programs and let us get back to having college athletics be what it should be.
- *Senior Woman Administrator*
- The thousands of student-athletes, primarily women and those competing in non-revenue sports, who will be "left behind" in this new world. The mid-majors that can't compete in this new world. It's all about money and it's sad.
- *Faculty Athletics Representative*
- Revenue sharing is great, athletes going out and getting NIL deals is great, just getting cash payments from schools is beyond what college athletics should be participating in.
- *Senior Woman Administrator*

- It is time to realize we are higher education institutions, not corporations. The ultimate benefit to playing college athletics is to obtain a college degree. We have lost sight of that.
- *Senior Woman Administrator*
- The amount of money being paid to a minority of student-athletes is clouding the majority and we are losing our focus which should be to develop student-athletes as elite athletes and contributing members of society.
- *Senior Woman Administrator*
- NIL and the transfer portal have sorely corrupted the very idea of college athletics....paying student athletes is fine, but the disparity created by the market value of players has ruined the concept of team.
- *Senior Woman Administrator*
- The NCAA governing structure and the Power 4 have the control over all NCAA issues. This is going to be the downfall of division 1 athletics in 1-5 years.
- *Director of Athletics*
- We have to end up at collective bargaining. It's really the only way forward. We already have it for graduate students and faculty, so the model exists now.
- *Faculty Athletics Representative*
- Classify student athletes as employees make them sign contracts. They want to be treated as professionals (pay), so go all the way and call them employees.
- *President/Chancellor*
- If we had collective bargaining with non-employment status, probably requiring an antitrust exemption, I think a lot of issues could be made better.
- *Director of Athletics*