

UA PAY TO PLAY
THE EVOLVING NCAA LANDSCAPE: UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

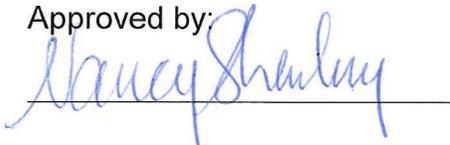
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Approved by:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Nancy Sharkey", is written over a horizontal line.

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Abstract

The NCAA is currently involved in at least three separate lawsuits that threaten imminent change to the current model of intercollegiate athletics. Although these suits could change the sports landscape, they are ultimately trying to give student-athletes more rights as individuals and determine if they should be compensated in addition to athletic scholarships. There is much ongoing debate over whether these possible changes will benefit the athletes or hinder them. This thesis explores the viewpoints of these current issues from three types of authorities: university athletic administrators, NCAA representatives, and athletes of past and present. Each section contains the pertinent interviews with each authority for the purpose of unique insight on how the lawsuits will affect policies, Title IX, economics, and student-athletes.

This thesis take the form of a multimedia website available at uapaytoplay.com. Over the course of my journalism studies, the importance of multimedia skills has been stressed because of new media and the ever-growing digital media platform. Taking into consideration the likely audience and current uncertainty of where the NCAA and student-athletes stand due to pending lawsuits, I conducted a series of interviews over the fall and spring semesters with individuals who will be directly and indirectly affected by the outcome of the lawsuits and the changing intercollegiate athletic landscape. I reached out to the Pacific-12 Conference Deputy Commissioner, a sports broadcaster for the Pac-12, the University of Arizona Athletic Director, the Senior Woman Administrator for Arizona Athletics and former Arizona softball player, the Senior Associate Director of Athletics for Business Operations, a former Arizona football player turned Arizona Development Office coordinator, and a current football player and softball player. I recorded the interviews with my own equipment. I edited and divided them up according to subject matter, then put them on YouTube. Once this was done, I created a website where I uploaded all the original content.

The website is divided into subject sections: Home, Policy Changes/Future, Title IX, Economics, and Athlete Voices.

Home

The business of college athletics is evolving.

The NCAA's amateur-only model is in question as conferences and universities obtain media and video game deals, form their own networks, and revenue from college tournaments grows exponentially.

As revenue has grown, some athletes have questioned when can they get a share of the action?

Currently, the NCAA is involved in at least three pending law suits questioning whether student-athletes should be paid in addition to earning an athletic scholarship.

The current legal issues call into question several aspects, including Title IX compliance, economics, and the voices of the athletes. Not all athletes agree, and some choose to stay out of the conversation.

The University of Arizona currently has 20 sports and 500 student-athletes. Twelve of those sports are women's, and eight are men's. The athletic department is privately funded through ticket sales, a share of media distribution money, and donors. Two sports generate money at Arizona: men's basketball and football.

Arizona has balanced its budget for the last 29 years. With each new NCAA policy change, the UA must find ways to remain in the black, officials say.

Policy Changes/Future

The NCAA is currently involved in three lawsuits that could change the current model that compensates some student-athletes by way of scholarship, partial or full tuition and fees.

The O'Bannon case involves former college athletes suing the NCAA and EA Sports for using their names, images, and likenesses in video games for profit while the athletes did not earn compensation. The court ruled in favor of O'Bannon and former athletes; they are to be compensated. The NCAA is appealing.

Jeffrey Kessler is a lawyer who is suing the NCAA claiming it an anti-trust organization. Kessler is fighting to make college athletics a free market with no specific salary cap that comes in the current form of a scholarship.

Recently, football players at Northwestern University filed to unionize and formally be considered employees of the university by a regional National Labor Relations Board. The players were successful, and Northwestern has appealed to reverse this decision.

Some consider these lawsuits a catalyst for current changes in NCAA policies. Others have their own opinions on how the current model can be improved.

Various Arizona Athletics employees explain.

Title IX

Passed in 1972, Title IX requires gender equity in any program that receives federal funding, including sports.

Because of the large male athletic rosters at many colleges, schools must stay in compliance with federal law and have equal athletic opportunities for female athletes. This ranges from equal number of scholarships to the equal quality of facilities.

Athletic participation must reflect the undergraduate population at each institution for a school to be Title IX compliant.

At the University of Arizona, sports like gymnastics, sand volleyball and soccer are women's sports — to compensate for the high numbers of male athletes in football.

The current lawsuits mainly discuss male athlete compensation, but Title IX will need to be taken into account when determining who gets what share of the money, if any.

Economics

The University of Arizona athletic department is self-funded.

Keeping the department's budget balanced, as it has been for the last 29 years, can require unique and strategic ways to generate revenue. This year, new NCAA rules including a different meal plan and cost of attendance have tested that creative fundraising.

The new meal plan — which offers more meals to athletes — will cost the UA an extra \$300,000 this year in addition to another \$1,200 per athlete to cover the full cost of attendance. Full cost of attendance can include cost of living, travel expenses and miscellaneous costs. At some west-coast schools, the cost can be as high as \$6,000 or \$7,000 and that cost of attendance difference could make some schools more attractive to athletes.

Television contracts with ESPN and FOX generate money for the Pac-12 Conference, which divides the money 12 ways and distributes to universities. While the Pac-12 Network, could dominate the college marketplace in the west at some point, it's not profitable yet, according to Greg Byrne.

Athlete Voices

There is no formula for the perfect student-athlete experience, whether it is track and field or softball, athlete experiences can vary. One common denominator is balance. Between daily routines of homework and studying vs. travel and practice, current and former athletes agree there's little time for much else, even eating or showering.

As the following student-athletes attest, their sport is like a full-time job, but they would not have it any other way.

Full thesis website can be found here: <http://uapaytoplay.com/>