Throughout my career in higher education, I have been involved in one way or another with intercollegiate athletics: as an undergraduate and graduate student, as a faculty member, and as an administrator. I believe strongly that intercollegiate athletics adds a great deal to the flavor and spirit of the college or university experience.

Over the past three years, I have taken my involvement with intercollegiate athletics, as they say in the sports vernacular, “to a whole new level.” In 2002 my colleague presidents in the America East Conference elected me to fill a seat on the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I Board of Directors. I accepted this position because I believed we were at a unique point in the history of college sports. University presidents were poised to assert their influence in a positive direction, to return academic integrity to college sports, and to reposition college sports within the context of higher education. We had allowed the entertainment value of intercollegiate sports to distort their original role. Here was an opportunity for reform.

Because of the great progress I believe we have made, I have increased my involvement with the NCAA significantly. Last year I was selected to chair two important committees: the Division I-AA and I-AAA Presidential Advisory Group, the group of presidents from universities that do not sponsor big-time football; and the Committee on Academic Performance, which is charged with overseeing the academic reform of Division I college sports.

In April I will become the chair of the executive committee of the NCAA, the organization’s highest governing body, and the first chair of that group to come from a non-football-playing university.

I have accepted these positions with enthusiasm because I believe that there is a true spirit of reform afoot within the NCAA, that we have already made great progress, and that there is much more to come. I am delighted to be centrally involved with that process, and especially pleased that the University of Hartford has assumed a leadership role.

At this university we have gotten intercollegiate athletics right for a long time. Our student-athletes succeed in their sports and in the classroom. Indeed, athletes’ graduation rates and their cumulative grade point averages outpace the student body as a whole, and have done so throughout my seven years as president. We get it.

Now we are seeing important changes at the NCAA level as well. Last year the NCAA board passed an academic performance program that will reassert the importance of academics. First, we passed regulations that require more core courses and better high school performance from prospective scholarship athletes. Next, we passed stiffer standards for progress-toward-degree requirements once the recruits are in college. Athletes now must show steady and defined progress toward specific degrees. No longer can an athlete major in staying eligible. These two reform measures send a strong message to student-athletes: you must take responsibility for your own academic performance in order to play college sports.

In January the NCAA board took our biggest step yet, passing regulations that will hold institutions responsible for the academic success of their student-athletes. This change sends a parallel message to college and university presidents. Just as we hold athletes responsible, we hold you responsible for their cumulative academic behavior.

Our first step in this direction was to institute a series of contemporary penalties based on a new measurement called the Academic Performance Rate (APR), which assesses term-by-term and year-by-year performance of student-athletes sport by sport, institution by institution. If teams fall below an APR score of 925, which equates to a projected graduation rate of 50 percent, they will not be able to re-award the scholarships of any athletes who leave school for academic reasons. This restriction will be a simple and powerful tool for reform. If these penalties had been in effect this year, 30 percent of all Division I football teams, 25 percent of all Division I baseball teams, and 20 percent of all Division I men’s basketball teams would have been affected.

These contemporary penalties are meant to act as warnings to teams and universities that they are heading in the wrong direction. With penalties capped at 10 percent of awardable scholarships, they are meant to send a strong warning but allow teams an opportunity...
Impressed with Positive Growth

I thoroughly enjoy reading *The Observer* when it arrives several times a year. I am impressed with the positive growth at the university and enjoy reading about the many changes occurring on the campus and [about] the Hartford environment in which these changes take place.

I also enjoy reading the Alumni News section and have decided to include some information about my own activities in recent years. I hope you will be able to include this information in your [next] issue of *The Observer*.

Thank you again for the fine publication, which keeps me informed of my alma mater!

Sincerely,

Patricia Yosha ’75
Exeter, N.H.

Editor’s note: See page 22 for Yosha’s news.

Aid for Tsunami Victims

Received on Jan. 6, 2005, from an alumnus living in Thailand.

I am one of the lucky ones who is safe and unharmed. I lived in New York City growing up, and now I live in Thailand. Very different places, and yet strangely similar in what has happened. Just like 9/11, it was a beautiful day. The resort beaches were glorious. . . . In a heartbeat, a killer wave came and swept so many out to sea . . . even the grandson of the King of Thailand was not spared. An act of Nature? An act of God? I cannot say. I only know that there was no warning.

No chance for so many to escape . . . I know I am lucky to be alive. . . . My plan is to go down to the south and try to help the victims and the orphaned children— the lost innocent souls who are still in shock from all this. I am only one person and, as I said before, I am one of the lucky ones. But so many were not as fortunate. Help me to help others if you can. Now it is the time to help the survivors survive fully. . . . Think of helping the Red Cross or UNICEF.

Yours sincerely,

James Randolph Bullock ’76
Pattaya, Thailand

Editor’s note: Bullock would like to hear from former classmates. You can e-mail him at balrennet@yahoo.com.

Future of Intercollegiate Athletics

As change always does, these penalties have ignited some controversy. That’s important, because to return academics to a central role in intercollegiate athletics, we need to get people’s attention. My colleagues and I are serious about this. The time to reform is now.

There is much more to be done. I have recently accepted a spot on a new group, the Presidential Task Force on the

And from an Observer Fan in Iran

I am the editor in chief of *Iranian Road & Structure* magazine. I really enjoyed reading *The Observer* magazine when a Hartford graduate worked for me and received it here. But she has gone to a job in another country, and I can’t find any way to subscribe to *The Observer*. I know it is for alumni members, but I would be grateful if you could send this magazine to me.

Best regards,

Pejman Shojaeion, Ph.D.
Tehran, Iran

Editor’s note: We will add Shojaeion to our international mailing list.

The Observer welcomes your letters and comments. Our e-mail address is observer@hartford.edu., or you can visit www.hartford.edu/observer and click on “Contacts and Links” for an online form. Our mailing address is *The Observer*, University of Hartford, 200 Bloomfield Avenue, West Hartford, CT 06117. Letters may be edited for space considerations.