



The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is a voluntary organization through which the nation's colleges and universities govern their athletics programs. It is comprised of institutions, conferences, organizations and individuals committed to the best interests, education and athletics participation of student-athletes.

Many believe the Association rules college athletics; however, it is actually a bottom-up organization in which the members rule the Association.

Faced with rising athletic expenses at universities across the country, the NCAA put together a task force to come up with ideas to help in the management of athletics program, to understand how peer institutions compare with one another, and to determine how to make the most of available funds.

To understand more about the innovative solution to this challenging issue, read on...



How it all started...

It was the flying wedge, football's major offense in 1905, that spurred the formation of the NCAA.

The game's rugged nature, typified by mass formations and gang tackling, resulted in numerous injuries and deaths and prompted many institutions to discontinue the sport. Others urged that football be reformed or abolished from intercollegiate athletics.



Flying Wedge, NCAA Hall of Champions
Indianapolis

President Theodore Roosevelt summoned college athletics leaders to two White House conferences to encourage such reforms. In early December 1905, Chancellor Henry M. MacCracken of New York University convened a meeting of 13 institutions to initiate changes in football-playing rules. At a subsequent meeting December 28 in New York City, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) was founded by 62 members.

The IAAUS officially was constituted March 31, 1906, and took its present name, the NCAA, in 1910. For several years, the NCAA was a discussion group and rules-making body; but in 1921, the first NCAA national championship was held: the National Collegiate Track and Field Championships. Gradually, more rules committees were formed and more championships were held. And the rest, as they say, is history...

Today's NCAA

Did You know that, today, the NCAA governs a broad range of intercollegiate sports? We hear mostly about the sports with lucrative financial aspects—football and basketball. But you should know that the list includes sports like fencing, bowling, ice hockey, tennis, lacrosse, golf, and water polo. In fact, the list is quite extensive.

The Dilemma

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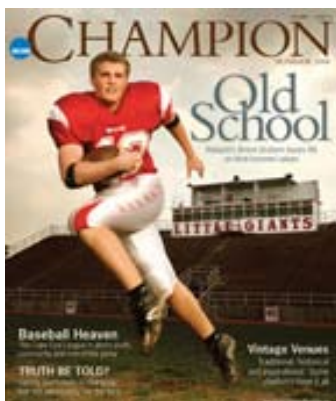
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The task force guided the creation of a tool to that would both highlight a school's revenue and expense streams year-over-year, enabling administrators to compare their results based on conference, peer group, subdivision, public/private, and budget.

The first effort was developed in-house, using Flash/Flex. The group comparators, along with a set of twenty-six indicators. The results of this first effort did not receive the desired reaction from the review committee members, who were looking for a more intuitive visual presentation of the data (i.e., the "Wow" factor).

InfoSol consultants were brought in to work on the development, and an outside design firm recommended color selections for use in the visualization. The addition of the "what if" capability, plus the visual presentation, gave the dashboard the impact that was needed. Thus, the NCAA Financial Dashboard was created.

What does the NCAA Dashboard show?



Since much of the information gathering had been accomplished in the first effort, the InfoSol consultants were able to develop a dashboard prototype quickly, using SAP BO's Xcelsius®. This prototype enabled the presentation of even more data.

The NCAA Dashboard Indicators are comparators that enable member institutions to evaluate quickly how their academic and financial data compares with up to three peer groups of institutions. Also included are group comparators, including conference, sub-division, public-private designation, and athletic expense budget level.

Since users of the dashboard prefer to view information in different formats, both graphic and tabular presentation are available with the click of a button.

Combination line/bar graphs reflect the institution's data and highlight the 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles of the group comparators — particularly important when the user is looking for "out of normal" performance in a given area.

Trending line graphs show the institution's data and the 50th percentile of the group comparators for the most recent four fiscal years' data.

The dashboard offers selectable views, based on simplicity or on user specifics. For instance, the Presidential View, as shown below, uses eight pre-selected key indicators.



Figure 1. The Presidential View shows indicators and comparisons in an easy to view format. It also illustrates the other view tabs available at the top of the dashboard—a great feature for increasing real estate for your data.

The Variance view highlights indicators that lie above the 75th percentile or fall below the 25th percentile – good for a quick view of out of norm conditions.

For those users who want to customize their view, "My View" enables the selection of key indicators that are most important to the viewer.

And, for those users who want to see everything, the **All Indicators** page displays the extensive list of selectable indicators.

"We now have a solution that uses contemporary technology, with many ease of use features. If you could sum it up in one word, that word would be 'nifty'."

—Sally Roush, San Diego State University



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Standout Features

One of the real stars of the NCAA Dashboard is the ability to perform “what if” analysis. This type of analysis empowers the university presidents to focus on the decision-making process rather than the mechanics of how the calculations are made.

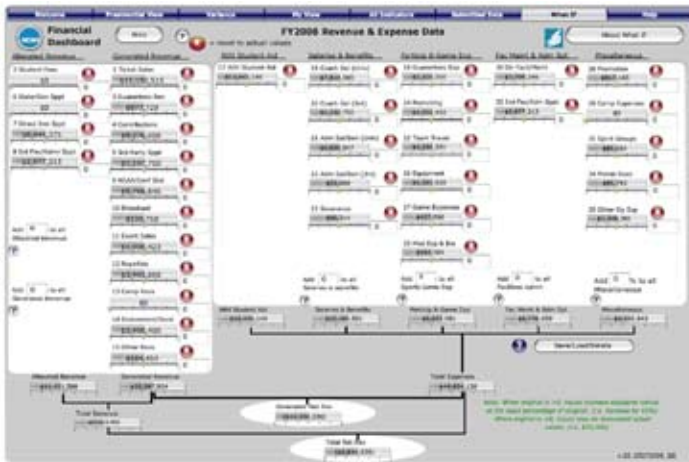


Figure 2. The ability to perform “what if” scenarios quickly, adjusting a variety of revenue and expense categories, provides valuable input to the decision-making process. The incorporation of Alerts that use color coding (red-yellow-green) for quick recognition of the performance of a given area adds to the list of customized features.

One can only imagine the complexity of attempting to perform this type of “what if” analysis using traditional methods, such as spreadsheets and complex algorithms. The time savings alone place this capability high on the list of standout features.

Peer selection is another standout feature, enabling the user to change peer comparisons with a few mouse clicks.

Lessons Learned...

As with all key projects, most people involved learn many things that they wish they had known prior to beginning such a project.

The “lessons learned” category includes such best practices as:

- **Respect the capabilities of the “tools” used**— don’t try to turn a dashboard tool into a “day-to-day” operational tool. Because the data is updated on an annual basis for the NCAA dashboard, it provides a snapshot that gauges where an institution stands compared with its peers, facilitating dialogue between the athletics and university administrators.
- **Train first** — ensure that team members have the training necessary to be successful and avoid frustration.
- **Crawl before your run** — Develop a prototype or proof of concept before launching into a major effort.
- **Define your environment** -- Identify needed data and determine if dashboards need to be connected or unconnected.
- **Understand the skillset needed** — Xcelsius has many easy to use features and an intuitive interface, which allows the user to learn the tool quickly.
- **Pay attention to Documentation** — Don’t skip or minimize this effort.
- **Manage expectations and communicate** — Be clear early in the effort, stay on track, and let people know what is happening.
- **Notify people when the “tool” is ready for usage.** Follow-up is necessary, particularly if e-mail is your primary notification method.

“Last May (2008), for the first time, the NCAA made aggregated financial data from college athletic departments available to its members. So far, more than 250 Division 1 universities and colleges have received a ‘dashboard’ of some 26 financial indicators that enables them to compare their revenues and spending with aggregated numbers for their peer group,” says NCAA finance chief Jim Isch.

The dashboards are part of the NCAA’s ongoing effort to improve athletic-department financial reporting. In 2006, the association began requiring universities to file audited reports using common accounting standards. Isch expects to see more changes to reporting requirements by 2010, most likely concerning capital costs.

As reported in CFO Magazine,
by reporter Kate Plourd



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What's Next?

Through a survey, the NCAA collected a set of enhancements to the Division I Financial Dashboard. This approach is a great way to get early “buy-in” on the effort to make desired changes and enhancements, and many of these were implemented in the second year of the tool, which was released summer of 2009. InfoSol also helped the NCAA develop a conference version of the Division I Dashboard, which gave the conference offices the ability to view the dashboards for all their member institutions in a single tool. Finally, a Division II Scholarship Simulation Tool was also developed.

Because of the success of the Division I Financial Dashboard, plans are underway to develop a Division II Financial Dashboard and a Division II Conference Version that contain indicators of interest to the Division II schools, to be released summer of 2010. The NCAA also hopes to integrate Xcelsius, Crystal Reports, and other Edge reporting tools for internal reporting projects.

“Over time, we expect to see increasing usage and payback with this capability. It provides us with insights that will help us to be more cost effective, productive, and responsive.”

—Mark Spencer, Oregon State University



“Intercollegiate athletics in America is a unique experience, linked both by tradition and value to higher education. Today, more than 380,000 student-athletes participate in college sports at NCAA member institutions. The overwhelming majority of them are students first and then athletes, and they participate for the love of the game.”

As a former university president and current NCAA president, I believe in the developmental value of sports participation. Intercollegiate athletics is proof that the modern American university experience is much more than lectures and tests. College sports is both a laboratory in life-lessons for those who participate and a model of character development for those who watch.”

Myles Brand, NCAA President

About the InfoSol Logo

Over 4,500 years ago, the Ancient Egyptians developed an advanced civilization built on solutions — including agricultural irrigation techniques that are still in use today, brain surgery, international trade, and the modern day calendar. Their knowledge was admired throughout the ancient world, and their solutions were sought by all.

Knowledge was related to the symbol of the eye — because observation was considered the predominant means of gaining knowledge.

Like the Egyptians, InfoSol has developed a business built on solutions — information systems and business intelligence solutions. Our solutions are created from our knowledge of information technology gained through careful observation of what is viable and what is not.

The Egyptian Eye, the InfoSol insignia, reflects solutions based on knowledge through observation.

