In 2013, there has been yet another call for reform in intercollegiate athletics. Recent scandals at the University of Miami and Ohio State University, the Ed O’Bannon lawsuit and the “All Players United” movement are just a few examples of the difficult decisions that are facing college sports. To that end, the NCAA intends to “look at a whole different governance model for Division I” in January of 2014 and further, according to NCAA President Mark Emmert, “the only thing everybody agrees on with Division I governance is that it doesn’t work” (Patterson, 2013). Issues in intercollegiate athletics and the call for reform have been around almost as long as college athletics itself. The purpose of this poster presentation is twofold: it will examine the history of intercollegiate athletic reform, through a literature review, to determine if there has been any significant or lasting change in the structure and culture, and then it will also serve as a primer for those who are unfamiliar with the history of the reform itself.

Problems in intercollegiate athletics have persisted for well over 100 years. In 1867, the first college football game between Princeton and Rutgers included players who should have been considered academically ineligible due to poor grades (Savage, Bentley, McGovern, and Smiley, 1929). In 1880, a student publication at Harvard indicated that students were attending the University solely with the purpose of playing sports (Smith, 2011). And, “illegal recruiting” was prevalent in the 1890’s (Eitzen & Sage, 2003; Savage et al., 1929). In 1898, the “Brown Conference” brought together faculty, alumni, and students in order to recommend some rules, such as student-athletes should not be paid, must satisfy eligibility requirements, and be in good standing academically (Smith, 2011). Few colleges ultimately accepted the reform measures. In 1906, the Intercollegiate Athletics Association of the United States (IAAAUS) was founded, which was renamed the NCAA in 1910. The NCAA was considered to be solely a rule-making body until it staged its first championship in 1921 (Smith, 2011). In 1929, the Carnegie Foundation completed a national study that called for college presidents to gain control over the athletics on their campuses, as issues of professionalism, illegal recruiting, weak students and corruption were still, or again, a problem (Savage et al., 1929).

Other attempts at reform include the “Sanity Code” of 1948 that set guidelines for recruiting and scholarships (Sack and Staurowsky, 1998), the ACE Committee in the 1950’s that was created in response to a cheating scandal in college basketball (Thelin, 1994), the 1974 Hanford Report that addressed problems with financing in college athletics (Sperber, 1998), and more recently, the Knight Foundation Commission which reported problems including academic neglect, the professionalization of the student-athlete, corrupt recruiting, and the commercialization of college athletics (Knight Commission, 1991). A subsequent Knight Foundation Commission report cited a need to emphasize academic values, treat college athletes as non-professionals, and transparency in spending (Knight Commission, 2010).

While some reform acts have been marginally successful, these efforts have created many ineffective and obscure rules and regulations in which the language seems largely unchanged over the years and further, these acts have failed to bring about lasting structural and cultural change in college athletics. This is evident as the current call for reform in intercollegiate athletics is a response to many of the same issues that have been prevalent since the 19th century. It is the intent of this poster to not only present the history of reform over the years, but then to address any changes and outcomes that result from the NCAA’s meetings in 2014.