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Early NCAA Attempts to Create a Women's 'Governance Plan,' 1967-1973

“[I]t was part of the whole NCAA-AAU battle,” commented Katherine Ley, Chair of the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, on the NCAA’s growing interest in women’s athletics. “The NCAA was fighting for jurisdiction over the AAU... [but] it did not have any female athletes so how could it expect to be regarded as the controlling organization [of all intercollegiate athletics].” Ley’s comment about the NCAA’s vulnerability in its decades-long battle against the AAU was right on target. In order to change this disadvantageous situation, the NCAA worked to legitimize itself as the appropriate administrator of athletic programs for college women. Toward the end of the 1960s the NCAA pushed for the inclusion of the AIAW as an institutional membership organization under the guidance of Walter Byers and its legal counsel. Beginning in the 1970s, the NCAA stepped up its involvement in women’s athletics by attempting to affiliate with the AIAW. The plan only failed when the women refused to submit to NCAA control.

The NCAA leadership's initiatives on women's athletics, however, did not seem to be popular among its members, at least in the early 1970s. Differences between the NCAA leadership and its members resulted in no action regarding women's programs in the early months of 1972. Yet history played a trick on those men and women who probably prayed for some kind of divine intervention. In June 1972, the U.S. Congress passed Title IX of the Education Amendments, prohibiting sex discrimination. Like a double edged sword, the new legislation eventually empowered millions of women with the right to equal opportunities for participating in various activities, including intercollegiate athletics. It also gave the NCAA the legal justification to administer programs for women, thus destroying the separate sphere of the female establishment. While the men had to share some of their financial resources with the women, eventually the women would have little choice but to relinquish their power and control of women's athletics to the men who controlled the NCAA. A more direct and immediate effect of Title IX in the NCAA-AIAW struggle was its impact on NCAA's legislation. At the 1973 convention, the NCAA succeeded in removing regulations which prohibited female students from participating in the NCAA events and thus opened the door for the NCAA to administer and eventually take control of intercollegiate athletics for women.



Looking forward to the next twenty-five years.