OPENING REMARKS
Virginia Shepherd, Co-Chair, Vanderbilt University

There have been several recent initiatives that led to us meeting here today and tomorrow. Historically, as the AAUP has stated, there has not been a strong collective faculty voice calling for reform in intercollegiate athletics. The Drake Group was formed in 1999 with the aim of closing the ever-widening gap between athletics and education. Faculty Senates at the PAC-10 institutions adopted resolutions criticizing the commercialization of college athletics. Most recently the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) made up of the Big Ten schools and the University of Chicago, endorsed a resolution urging presidents, faculty athletics committees, and faculty conference representatives to join in a concerted effort to deal with identified problems. This group has now expanded into the national Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA), with members representing schools from the six BCS conferences. In an historic meeting in Chicago on April 12, the COIA met with representatives from the NCAA and the Association of Governing Boards, and have recently issued a consensus statement endorsing the proposed NCAA reforms and the disincentive/incentive initiative.

The AAUP also points out that the prominence and/or size of faculty senates at our institutions represent an exciting vehicle for faculty engagement in sports reform. As representatives of our respective senates, we have the ability to enter into discussions today and tomorrow that could lead help us identify concerns and issues that we can take back to our faculty and presidents for their endorsement. All of our campuses share some of the same concerns about academics and athletics, but we must also be aware that there are significant differences and issues unique to each of our institutions. Therefore, I urge you to evaluate your own campus practices and structures, and where possible and appropriate, work toward endorsement and implementation of recommendations from our group, from the COIA, and from the NCAA. Tomorrow there will be a press conference at 4, waiting to hear what we agree that we can collectively say at the conclusion of our meeting. One possibility was sent to you earlier, and I will read that statement. If this is endorsed by us, then we can either end by stating some agreed upon next steps, or we can go further based on discussions tomorrow and present one or two recommendations from each of our working groups. These questions we can deal with tomorrow, but it’s important that you begin to think about them today.