
The NIL Playbook: Policy and Power in the Big Ten

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Abstract:

The introduction of Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) legislation has significantly reshaped the collegiate athletic landscape. This study examines NIL policies across Big Ten athletic departments, employing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Policy Analytical Framework to assess problem identification, policy analysis, and strategy development. Thirteen publicly available institutional policies were analyzed. Findings reveal common throughlines such as strong organizational structure, availability of contact information and resources, and frequent reference to NCAA regulations. However, significant gaps emerged, including inconsistent disclosure timelines, lack of policy revision dates, and limited integration of state and federal law. While some institutions provided comprehensive guidance – including consequences for non-compliance and detailed commonly asked questions – others adopted vague or temporary approaches that may create confusion or weaken institutional accountability. The analysis highlights both strengths (e.g., detailed content and resource accessibility) and concerns (e.g., inadequate policy updates and inconsistent enforcement mechanisms). Ultimately, while Big Ten NIL policies generally support student-athletes, variation across institutions risks creating blind spots that could hinder athlete protection and compliance. This study underscores the importance of clearer, more consistent NIL frameworks to ensure equitable support for student-athletes navigating this evolving era of college sport.

Keywords:

NIL Policy, Big Ten Conference, CDC Policy Analytical Framework.