# Fencing Conference Handbook 

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## I. Introduction

Since fencing is a minor sport, and one that brings in little revenue, few colleges field varsity fencing teams. Even fewer general athletic conferences support fencing: only 12 of 34 men's varsity fencing teams and 9 of 23 women's varsity fencing teams are affiliated with National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) conferences ("NCAA Sports Sponsorship").

At many colleges, competitive fencing clubs fill the void left by the lack of a varsity team ("Other Colleges"). Even if their conferences supported fencing, these clubs would not be eligible to compete. There exist conference-unaffiliated collegiate events, like the Temple Open fencing tournament, to which teams and clubs can send fencers, but if they seek membership in a larger organization, the leaders and coaches of clubs and unaffiliated teams must form independent conferences themselves ("college club league").

Independent fencing conferences can be exclusive to varsity teams, exclusive to club teams, or mixed. For varsity teams, bouts fenced in independent conferences can count towards NCAA results. Conferences also add a structure to the season, providing competition that extends beyond a single event, and can give clubs a sense of legitimacy and opportunities to compete in an organized setting that they otherwise would not have.

The goal of this handbook is to provide coaches and team leaders with the information they need to start new conferences, if there are no extant conferences in the region for them to join. It covers reasons to join a conference, finding starting members, administration, season structure, scheduling, tournament formats, equipment, and referees.

Information in this handbook is drawn from consultation with Wayne McCullough, head coach of the University of Maryland Fencing Club and former commissioner of the Baltimore-Washington Collegiate Fencing Conference (BWCFC); Mat Johnstone, president of the Temple University Fencing Club; and Nikki Franke, coach of the Temple University women's varsity fencing team; as well as the constitutions of BWCFC, the Mid-Atlantic Collegiate Fencing Association (MACFA), and the Southwest Intercollegiate Fencing Association (SWIFA).

## II. Why Join a Conference?

Being in a conference provides a structure to the season that would not otherwise be available. When a team is a member of a conference, it will compete in an annual series of regularly scheduled meets, and does not have to seek ad-hoc meets to fill the season. Fortunately for teams with small budgets, these meets can be guaranteed to be within a reasonable travel radius, since most conferences are regional. In these meets, the team will encounter the same opponents season after season, which forges a community. Instead of being limited to one-off events in which the winners and losers are determined after day, these teams also have the opportunity to work for a larger goal, that is, success in their conference. Since teams can view their results in terms of the conference, goals and progress become more concrete ("Being in a conference").

For varsity teams, conference competition is not a distraction from the NCAA season. The bouts that these teams fence in conference competition, when fenced against other NCAA teams, can count as NCAA results.

For club teams, which do not enjoy the same organizational structure as varsity teams, these conferences can provide a sense of legitimacy, because they give club teams the opportunity to compete within a larger structure as representatives of their schools. In conferences that mix club and varsity teams, the club teams actually have the chance to compete on an equal footing with varsity teams. Conferences can do a lot to help club teams approximate the varsity experience.

## III. Finding Co-Founders

## 1. Eligibility

Before teams are invited to form a conference, it is necessary to decide whether the conference will be open to clubs, varsity teams, or both. At some colleges, there is no overlap between the club and varsity teams (Franke; Johnstone); to account for schools where there is overlap, competitors in club-only leagues can be restricted to student who are not active NCAA fencers ("college club league"). Because it can be difficult to find enough varsity teams in a region to fill a conference roster, some varsity conferences, like MACFA, choose to accept club teams as members ("Members").

## 2. Geography

Collegiate conferences are predominantly regional. As such, members should be chosen by location. Ensure that no team would have to travel an unreasonable amount of time to reach a competition venue. In MACFA, the farthest two teams are separated by about 6.5 hours of driving; most competitions are situated more centrally to prevent such long trips.

## 3. Other affiliations

When approaching area teams about forming a conference, bear in mind that they may have preexisting affiliations. While they may have interest in joining an additional conference, it may be a better idea to apply for membership in the preexisting conference instead of forming a new one, assuming that the preexisting conference offers the appropriate level of competition.

## IV. Choosing Leaders

In order to ensure the smooth operation of the conference, officers must be appointed to serve as the conference administration. Their duties can include organizing events, compiling results, and overseeing changes to rules and conference membership. This section presents the breakdowns of responsibility in BWCFC and SWIFA as examples.

## 1. Representation

To ensure all teams in the conference are taken into consideration in decisions, it is common for the member teams to vote on officers and some conference business.

In BWCFC, the decision-making body of the conference is the executive committee, which includes a representative from each member institution. The committee conducts business by simple majority, and is tasked with scheduling events, admitting members, and evaluating appeals, in addition to approving proposals from the officers and dealing with any other business not handled by an officer (Baltimore-Washington Collegiate Fencing Conference).

The coaches' committee of MACFA is composed of the head coaches of all member teams, although only varsity coaches are permitted to vote (unless a club is specifically granted voting rights) (Mid-Atlantic Collegiate Fencing Association).

The executive committee of SWIFA is made up of the conference's officers, which are elected by the member teams at an annual meeting. The committee is tasked with scheduling and running events, making rules, determining dues, and handling finances ("By-Laws").

## 2. Example officer roles

In BWCFC, the executive committee elects a Commissioner, who proposes rules, sets dues, chooses bout committees, helps run events, compiles results, and runs committee meetings. It also elects one Vice-Commissioner per sub-division established within the conference (BWCFC is currently divided into the North and South divisions). The Vice-Commissioners help run events within their respective divisions, and can assume the Commissioner's duties when necessary (Baltimore-Washington Collegiate Fencing Conference).

In MACFA, there are two officers: the Commissioner and the Treasurer. The Commissioner serves a four-year term following election by the coaches' committee, and is tasked with coordinating event scheduling, communicating with other organizations, and establishing subcommittees. The Treasurer is appointed yearly by the Commissioner, and is tasked with conference's finances (Mid-Atlantic Collegiate Fencing Association).

In SWIFA, the four officers on the executive committee are the Chair, the ViceChair, the Secretary, and the Treasurer. The Chair runs meetings and assigns members of committees. The Vice-Chair can assume the duties of the Chair when necessary, and can be delegated tasks by the executive committee. The Secretary conducts correspondence, records meetings, and maintains the website. The Treasurer makes budgets and keeps track of conference finances ("By-Laws").

## V. Structuring the Season

To ensure fair results, every team in the conference should fence the same number of bouts each season. The most straightforward way to accomplish this is to have every team fence every other team in the conference. Most conferences have sufficiently few teams that this is not a problem.

The season should be split into a number of meets, so that teams will have equitable amounts of traveling to do and so that competitions will not take multiple
consecutive days, requiring teams to stay overnight. BWCFC currently has two meets per season (Baltimore-Washington Collegiate Fencing Conference), MACFA has three (MidAtlantic Collegiate Fencing Association), and SWIFA has between four and six, inclusive ("Competition Operations Manual").

## 1. Determination of rankings

The final standings of teams in the conference can be determined either by ranking the teams by regular season record or through a playoff, possible formats for which are presented in section VII. Team records can be based on the results of all bouts the team has fenced or on the team's match results (how many teams that team has won a majority of bouts against). BWCFC and MACFA both base team records on matches, and determine final standings directly by record (Baltimore-Washington Collegiate Fencing Conference).

An alternative system in used in SWIFA, each meet takes the format outlined in section VII.1.d (without the individual component). Teams are awarded points based on their finish at each meet (the winner receives as many points as there are teams present at the meet, the runner-up receives one fewer point, etc.), and the conference champion is the team with the most points at the end of the season ("Competition Operations Manual").

## 2. Individual championships

Some conferences end their seasons with individual championships, in which fencers compete independently of their teams. Possible formats for individual championships are given in section VII.

## VI. Scheduling Meets

## 1. Choosing a date

Dates must be chosen with the obligations of all conference teams in mind. If conference members have pre-existing conference affiliations, meets should be scheduled so as not to conflict with meets for that conference. Dates of major regional fencing tournaments unassociated with any conference should also be avoided. Holidays and major sporting events may also be wise to avoid ("Fencing conferences").

## 2. Choosing a location

Competition venues must be chosen in light of the number of strips that will be set up; the hosting institution must have enough space for the meet.

There is no codified method for situating BWCFC and MACFA meets ("Fencing conferences"; Mid-Atlantic Collegiate Fencing Association). SWIFA meets follow a rotation, in which each team is offered the opportunity to host a meet in order. Teams have the prerogative to decline to host a meet (Southwestern Intercollegiate Fencing Association).

## VII. Running Tournaments

## 1. Team

## a. Dual Meets

The dual meet is the standard regular season format of the NCAA. In a dual meet, each team fields three fencers in each weapon. Within each weapon, each fencer fences each fencer on the opposing team, for a total of 9 bouts per weapon, and a total of 27 bouts across all weapons (National Collegiate Athletic Association).
i. Full matches vs. best of 9

In some competitions, all nine bouts are fenced in each weapon; in others, the match ends when one team reaches five victories in a weapon, and so has clinched victory in the match within that weapon. Best-of-9 scoring is usually only done if overall team rankings (i.e., across all three weapons) counts the three weapon-matches separately, instead of components of a larger match. BWCFC and MACFA both employ dual meets with full matches, which is the default under NCAA rules.

## ii. Systems of fencing

The NCAA offers several methods of splitting a match between strips. In System 1 , which is the default, two strips are used per match, épée and sabre start simultaneously (one on each strip) and foil starts on the first of the two strips to be available. In System 2, two strips are used per match, and three bouts of sabre are alternated with three bouts of foil and three bouts of épée fenced at the same time. In System 3, one strip is used per match, and sets of three bouts each of sabre, foil, and épée are rotated. In System 4, two strips are used per match, épée and foil start simultaneously (one on each strip) and sabre
starts on the first of the two strips to be available. In System 5, three strips are used per match, and all weapons fence simultaneously (National Collegiate Athletic Association).

In MACFA, System 2 is the preferred system of fencing (Mid-Atlantic Collegiate Fencing Association). BWCFC uses a " 2.5 strip" system, which makes a modification to System 5 such that a sabre strip is shared between two matches, since sabre matches tend to be the fastest completed ("Fencing conferences").
b. A vs. $A, B$ vs. $B, C$ vs. $C$

In this format, each team designates an $\mathrm{A}, \mathrm{B}$, and C fencer (in descending order of skill) in each weapon. In each match, the two A fencers from the opposing teams fence, as do the two B fencers and the two C fencers. Records can be determined based on matches (the team that won two of the three bouts won the match) or based on bouts.

## c. Relay

The relay format is the standard format of the United States Fencing Association (USFA). In the relay format, each fencer fences each fencer of the opposing team within each weapon. However, score is kept for the team instead of for each fencer, and each bout ends when the score of one team reaches the next interval of five (i.e., the first bout ends when one team's score reaches 5 touches, the second bout ends when one team's score reaches 10 touches, etc.). The match ends when a team's score reaches 45 touches, at which point that team is the victor (United States Fencing Association).
d. Pools and DEs

If a single meet is to act as an entire competition, pools and direct elimination bouts (DEs) can be used. In this format, teams are sorted into groups within which they fence all other teams in the same group, using whatever match format is specified by the organizers of the competition. The teams are then seeded according to their performance in the pools, and a certain number or proportion of them advances to a single elimination bracket to determine the final standings.

SWIFA uses this format, with matches in the dual meet format discussed in section VII.1. a that are fenced to completion in the pools and best-of-9 in the DEs.

## 2. Individual

a. Pools and DEs

The individual pools and DEs format is the same as the format in section VII.1.d with individual fencers instead of teams and bouts instead of matches. Fencers can be seeded for initial placement into pools according to their ranking from the regular season. BWCFC uses this format for the individual championships (Baltimore-Washington Collegiate Fencing Confererence).
b. A vs. $A, B$ vs. $B, C$ vs. $C$

In this format, fencing is conducted in the same manner as in section VII.1.b. However, the rankings of the individual fencers are determined within their level (i.e., among As, among Bs, or among Cs), and a certain number of top As, a certain number of top Bs, and a certain number of top Cs are promoted to a single-elimination DE bracket to determine the final standings. MACFA uses this format for the individual championships (Mid-Atlantic Collegiate Fencing Association).

## 3. Combined: NCAA Championship Format

The NCAA championships employ a format that assigns team standings based on individual results. In this format, fencers are individually selected to compete in the championships, and are organized into pools of 24 , in which each fencer fences all other fencers in the same pool. Each team receives a point for every victory a fencer from that team earns in the pools. These point totals determine the team standings. The top four fencers from the pools then fence DEs to determine the final individual standings (National Collegiate Athletic Association).

## VIII. Acquiring Equipment and Referees

## 1. Strips

The number of strips required for a meet can be determined by multiplying the number of matches to be fenced simultaneously (if all teams are to be in a match at once, this is half of the number of teams present) by the number of strips per match according to the system of fencing (see section VII.1.a.ii).

A fairly standard way to gather the necessary equipment is to require each participating team to bring enough equipment to set up at least one strip. This is the policy adopted by BWCFC, MACFA, and SWIFA ("Fencing conferences"; Mid-Atlantic Collegiate Fencing Association; "Competition Operations Manual").

## 2. Referees

The number of referees required for each weapon is equal to the number of matches to be fenced simultaneously. If a 2.5 strip format is used, only half as many sabre referees are required (one for every two matches). If more than 8 referees are required, it may be beneficial to hire a head referee in addition.

To find referees to hire, inquire in the local fencing community in order to compile a list of local referees. When contacting referees to ask them to work at a meet, be specific about the nature of the job ("Fencing conferences").

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## Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Bout: A bout is a single combat between two fencers. A bout is normally fenced until one fencer reaches five touches, although individual DE bouts are frequently fenced until one fencer reaches fifteen touches.

Club team: For the purposes of this handbook, a club team is a team affiliated with a sport club at a college or university. It does not have recognition from the NCAA or sponsorship from its school's athletic department on the varsity level.

Conference: A conference is an organization of teams formed to facilitate competition between the member teams.

DE: A DE (direct elimination bout or match) is a bout or match fenced as part of a bracket to determine final standing, as opposed to a bout or match fenced in a pool. A DE bout is usually fenced to fifteen touches, instead of five.

Épée: Épée is one of the three weapons used in fencing.
Foil: Foil is one of the three weapons used in fencing.
Match: A match is a combat between two teams. It usually takes the form of several bouts between the fencers of the opposing teams.

Meet: A meet is an event at which teams compete with each other as part of the operation of a conference.

Sabre: Sabre is one of the three weapons used in fencing.
Strip: A strip is the area on which bouts are fenced. A strip is 14 meters long and between 1.5 and 2 meters wide, and must have clearly delimited borders. In a competition, each strip must be equipped with an electronic scoring apparatus and two cable reels, one to connect each fencer to the apparatus.

Touch: A touch is a point scored by one fencer against another.
Varsity team: A varsity team is a team with recognition from the NCAA and full sponsorship from its school's athletic department.

Weapon: There are three weapons used in fencing: the épée, the foil, and the sabre. Each weapon has different rules and different styles of fencing. As a result, fencing is only contested within each weapon (i.e., two fencers in a bout always fence with the same type of weapon).

## Appendix B: Example Constitution

## BWCFC Constitution

The Baltimore-Washington Collegiate Fencing Conference (BWCFC) is a developmental conference, for the purposes of promoting fencing, sportsmanship, and intercollegiate competition. The conference shall consist of a regular season and championships.

## Section I: Membership

1) The conference consists of all member institutions in good standing. Member institutions must be four year accredited college or universities either adjacent or inside to the existing geographical area of the conference.
2) Each institution consists of one or more teams, either a co-ed team or separate men's and women's teams. The conference shall vote before the start of the season on whether to allow separate teams. Co-ed teams from institutions in good standing shall always be allowed.
3) Team members must be registered students who meet the eligibility requirements of their institution. Each team is responsible for verifying that all team members meet these requirements. An institution that fields a fencer who does not meet the requirements will be in violation, as per section IV part 2.
4) Institutions may apply to join the conference by writing their request to the commissioner. The commissioner may arrange for scrimmage meets between the candidate school and member teems as the schedule allows. The executive committee will vote upon their membership application following the championships, and by simple majority may choose to allow, deny, or postpone the application for one year. The application may only be postponed once, and after a single postponement, the committee may only allow or deny the applicants membership.
5) The Commissioner may, with the consent of the Executive Committee, subdivide the conference into smaller units to aid in the planning and execution of tournaments.

## Section II: Rules

1) Except where noted, all current USFA rules apply.
2) All regular season matches shall be conducted under current NCAA Dual Meet rules except as noted:
a) If one team cannot field a full team of 9 fencers, each bout not fenced shall be recorded as a $0-0$ loss for that team, and the victory assigned to the fencer present at the strip.
b) If both teams have less than 9 fencers, each mutual forfeit shall be recorded as 0-0 loss for both teams.
c) If neither team has 14 or more victories for the match, both teams are considered to have lost the match. Likewise, if neither team has 5 or more victories in a weapon, both teams are considered to have lost the weapon-match.
3) Unless the commissioner proposes an accepted alternative, the season will be determined as follows:
a) Each team will compete with each other team during the course of the regular season.
b) Overall winners will be determined by total number of matches won, then by
number of bouts won, then by total indicators. Weapon-winners will be likewise determined by weapon-matches won, weapon bouts won, and indicators.
c) Excused absences may be granted for severe weather or an unprecedented and unplanned administrative interference unrelated to a disciplinary action.
i) For excused absences only, the team will attempt to make up the missed meets.
ii) If this is not possible, the team final standings will be based on the ratio of match victories, ratio of bout victories, and straight indicators.
iii) A match fenced with less than the full team and the remainder missing due to an excused absence is considered to be final, and may not be re-fenced.
iv) A team claiming an excused absence must provide documentation for the excuse to the commissioner, except in the case of severe weather.
v) The commissioner determines the validity of the absence, with appeals following the procedure in section VI, part 2.
d) Unexcused absences are to be treated as losses for the team, and also result in a part 2 infraction. A team that does not have an excused absence and does not inform the host team 15 days prior to the meet will still be required to pay the entry fees for the meet.
4) Unless the commissioner proposes an accepted alternative, the championships will be determined as follows:
a) The championships are to determine individual standings, not team standings
b) In order to be eligible, each fencer must have completed at least one regular season bout.
c) The competition will consist of two rounds of pools followed by a DE. The first round will be seeded by season standings: first by number of victories, second by total indicators, third by total touches scored. The second round will be seeded by the first round of pools. Both rounds will be combined to seed the DE's. Up to $50 \%$ of the fencers may be eliminated after each round of the pools, as decided by the combined results of the pool immediately preceding the cut. The amount eliminated from each round will be announced at least two weeks before the championships.
d) The host team may limit the number of fencers each team may bring, and must announce this at least 30 days prior to the competition. Entry fees may be set either per fencer or per team.
e) All teams must pre-register, and are required to pay entry fees as per registration, not per attendance.
f) Teams that fail to attend the championships short of an excused absence will be penalized a part 2 infraction.

## Section III: Organization

1) The executive committee will consist of one representative from each institution. All voting matters will be done by simple majority vote except where otherwise noted, with reasonable effort given to make sure each member has the opportunity to vote. If and only if there is a tie vote, the commissioner will receive a vote. If the commissioner is also a member of the executive committee, he/she may vote
normally, and cast a second vote in the case of ties.
They will be responsible for advising the commissioner, electing the commissioner and vice commissioner, approving the seasons rules and dues as proposed by the commissioner, setting the schedule, reviewing membership applications, evaluating appeals and all other duties not specified elsewhere.
2) There will be at least two officers for the conference, a Commissioner and several Vice-Commissioners. Each will be elected as soon as possible after the last meet of the season by the executive committee. No two officers may be from the same institution.

There will be one Vice-Commissioner per sub-division as laid out in Section I-5. If the conference is further divided mid season, a new Vice-Commissioner will be elected by the institutions in the new group. If a sub-division is removed mid-season, that Vice-Commissioner will retain office until the end of that season's championship.
a) The Commissioner will be responsible for proposing each seasons rules, setting annual dues, choosing the bout committee for conference tournaments, assisting host schools in the running of tournaments, compiling the seasons standings and statistics, and running executive committee meetings.
b) The Vice-Commissioner is to assist the host team in the running of a subdivision's tournament including choosing the bout committee, to advise the Commissioner, and to perform the commissioner's duties if they are unable to because of absences or conflict of interest.
3) Officers may be replaced by simple majority vote of the executive committee.

## Section IV: Infractions

1) An institution that commits a part 1 infraction will be under probation for 30 days. A second part 1 infraction during this time, including failing to correct the original part 1 infraction will result in a part 2 infraction.
2) An institution that commits a part 2 infraction will be under probation for one year. A second infraction under this section will result in the dismissal of the institution. The institution may re-apply for membership the following season
3) If a team, fencer, coach, or institution receives a black card under USFA rules, the executive committee is to be informed, and the committee, less the offending institution, is to consider additional punitive measures. They may decide, by simple majority vote, to assign no additional punishment, a probation against the institution as per part 1 or part 2 , or suspension of the offending fencer, coach or team not to exceed one year. For severe infractions, esp. those involving blatant cheating or severe actions contrary to sportsmanship, the committee may choose for immediate expulsion of the offending institution, fencer or coach by a $2 / 3$ rds majority vote.
4) An institution may appeal all part 1 and part 2 offenses to the executive committee minus the offending institution. A simple majority vote may either annul the decision or lessen the severity. Decisions under part 3 are final.

## Section V: Dues

1) The commissioner will set modest dues for each team or institution, to be verified by majority vote of the executive committee. The dues are to be set to fully cover the costs of trophies for the season, with any extra going to cover the costs of the championships.
2) A single team will be designated each season as the dues collector. They will be responsible for collecting dues from all teams, purchasing season trophies and medals, and bringing this and the net proceeds to the championships, plus a brief financial report. After the dues amount has been set, they will announce deadline for dues to be paid, no sooner than 60 days after the announcement of the deadline. They will also be responsible for reporting the status of dues collection to the commissioner.
3) The hosts of a meet may set a modest entry fee for all participating teams. The entry fee must be announced no less than 30 days prior to the meet, and it should reflect that actual, estimated cost to the host for the running of the meet.
4) Profits in dues and entry fees above $10 \%$ of the total costs collected for a meet are to be given to the host of the championships to offset costs. Profits of dues, entry fees and forwarded funds of the championships above $20 \%$ of the total costs are to be given first to any host school that suffered a financial loss for that season hosting a conference meet, up to the point of canceling any loss. Any remainder is to be paid to the hosts of the championships for the following season.
5) Each host school is to provide the commissioner and the executive committee a brief financial report within 30 days of the meet, and to pay any required forwarded funds. When the executive committee chooses the host school of the next season's championships after the current seasons championships, the host school of the current seasons championships will have 30 days after the announcement of the new host to pay.
6) Failure to pay dues, entry fees, or forwarded funds within 30 is considered to be a part 1 infraction. An additional infraction is to be assessed every 30 days. No team may fence in the championships or be awarded any trophy or prizes unless they are fully paid.

## Section VI: Appeals

1) Appeals dealing with the rules of fencing and the conduct of meets are to be conducted as designated by USFA rules. A final appeal may be made to the executive committee, and any appeal requires a $2 / 3$-majority vote to review the appeal, and a simple majority vote to decide if the ruling is to be overturned or accepted. Appeals should only be accepted by the committee under extraordinary circumstances
2) Appeals dealing with the rules of the conference are to be first taken to the officers, the Commissioner and Vice-Commissioner, who may only over-rule by unanimous vote. A final appeal may be made to the executive committee, where a simple majority vote will be required to review the appeal, and a simple majority vote may overrule or accept the ruling. Members of the committee personally involved should recuse themselves from the vote.

## Section VII: Modification

1) Any member of the executive committee may propose a change to the constitution. Proposals are to be communicated to the committee no later than two weeks before the championships. The full committee is to vote on the proposal after the championships, with a simple majority required for approval.
2) An emergency change to the constitution may also be made with a $2 / 3$-majority vote of the executive committee.

## Section VIII:

1) The charter members of the BWCFC will be the fencing club or unions of George Washington University, Goucher College, St John's College of Annapolis, St Mary's College of Maryland, The University of Maryland, Baltimore County, The University of Maryland, College Park and Temple University.
2) The constitution will be in effect once all charter members agree to and ratify it.
3) Once it is ratified, all charter members will be considered to be members in good standing of the BWCFC, and a Commissioner and Vice-Commissioner are to be elected.
4) All season standings and statistics prior to the constitution going into effect are considered official.

## Appendix C: Example Dual Meet Scoresheet



