

April 29, 2011

Memorandum to President Ruth J. Simmons
From the Athletics Review Committee
Further Thoughts and Recommendations following community discussion

The Athletics Review Committee released its preliminary report on April 21. Since that time, we have made presentations, answered questions, reviewed materials submitted to us through our website or directly to members of the committee, and debated with different groups about our findings and recommendations. But mostly we have listened. We have heard the reactions of students, both athletes and non-athletes, faculty, coaches and other staff from the Athletics Department, parents, alumni, and others. Most of those people have had a particular interest in a specific issue raised in our report -- the recommendation to reduce from 37 varsity teams to 34 -- but there have also been comments and suggestions concerning other parts of the report. We will prepare a summary of all the feedback we received and submit that information with our final report toward the end of reading period.

Timing of the Process

Unfortunately, much of the discussion to date has been dominated by the issue of timing rather than the actual recommendations. Issuing a report with recommendations of this magnitude at the time we did -- toward the end of the semester and just before reading period and exams -- was problematic at best. The Committee's charge from the Corporation quite specifically called for us to develop this plan in time for discussion at the May meeting of the Corporation, so the Committee did not have much choice about timing, but we knew all along that the tightness of the schedule would be an issue for many people. However, as the discussion has proceeded over the last week, it is clear that the impact of the timing issue has been even more substantial than we expected. Many students in particular have pointed out the incongruity of having a discussion that is in part about how to align the athletic program more effectively with academic programs and priorities at the precise time that the press of academic work is the greatest -- i.e., the end of the spring semester.

Given this feedback, we have come to believe that it would be unfair and unproductive to try to press forward immediately to make decisions about the status of individual teams, something that many students feel requires much more discussion before any final decisions are made. Instead we recommend that the President and the Corporation defer any decisions about specific teams until the October Corporation meeting and suspend all organized discussion of those issues until the start of the fall semester. If accepted, this recommendation would mean that fencing, skiing and wrestling would all continue as varsity programs in 2011-12.

Recommendations

Having said that, the Committee notes that the overall package of recommendations still seems right to us. Although we heard many comments and questions about specific recommendations, the overall package has held up to this broader scrutiny. The charge we were given was to (a) strengthen the athletics department and the varsity program in particular; (b) recommend a program that is sustainable over time; and (c) align the program more closely with the University's academic goals and priorities. Toward that end, we believe that there needs to be an infusion of new resources into the program in the form of increased budget for an improved salary program and selected increases in support staff. But we also believe the conclusion of earlier groups that it is harmful to the program to maintain 37

teams with the current level of resources. Even with the additional resources recommended here, it is our judgment that the facilities, support staff, and other infrastructure are not adequate to support 37 teams, and this issue needs to be addressed both by adding resources and reducing scope. We strongly recommend that the University return to the question of how many teams we can support at the beginning of the fall semester. Moreover, we urge that the President and Corporation approve the recommended plan by the time of the October Corporation meeting.

Deferring a final decision about the number of teams complicates somewhat another of the committee's recommendation; namely, the number of admissions slots for recruited athletes that can be given up as part of this overall plan. The committee has recommended a reduction of 30 slots, but that assumed there would be no slots necessary for the programs that we had recommended be discontinued. We can and should go forward to implement the reduction in slots starting with the Class of 2016, but that is just one more reason to be sure that we make final decisions about those programs by the time of the October Corporation meeting.

The specific elements of the recommended plan, in addition to the recommendation about the number of teams, include:

- An improved salary program designed to make compensation for coaching and other athletics staff competitive in the Ivy League or other appropriate market group
- Improved facilities, including additional locker rooms and other support space as well as field space for field hockey and related improvements
- Selected additions to support staff and operating expenses as outlined in the report;
- Appropriate steps to reduce the conflicts for students between their athletic and academic commitments and aspirations
- Improvements in financial aid that will help in the recruitment of students, including both athletes and non-athletes
- A reduction in the number of admissions slots for recruited athletes as described in the report
- A fund-raising plan to support these initiatives

All of these recommendations are explained in more detail in the April 21 report. In addition, the Athletics Department will need to develop a plan for managing the activities in 2011-12 of the three programs which we have recommended be discontinued – fencing, skiing, and wrestling -- including issues of staffing, student recruitment, and competitive status.

The committee will present its final report within 3 weeks.

For the Committee

Richard R. Spies (Chair)

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