

## Report of the Faculty Senate's Appointees to the Athletics Advisory Board

Prepared by Yngve Ramstad for presentation to the Faculty Senate at its April 21, 2005, meeting.

As specified in section 5.14.10 of the University Manual, the Athletics Advisory Board serves as an advisory policy review board to the President for all athletic programs, including intercollegiate, club, intramural, and recreational sports. As stated in section 5.14.10, the Board "shall advise and review, on a continuing basis, all fiscal, educational and social policy affecting all athletic program, make recommendations regarding level of competition, and the nature of intercollegiate schedules." The Board consists of a chair, me, who is also the University's Faculty Representative to the NCAA, and eight members, of which four are faculty—John Boulmetis (Education), Senator Tim Tyrell (Environmental and Natural Resource Economics), Senator Barbara Luebke (Journalism), and David Heskett (Physics)—two are alumni—Richard Rendine and Gerald McKinney, one is a graduate student—George Nippo (College Student Personnel)—and one an undergraduate student—Brian McGuire (Biology). Ex officio members are the Director of Athletics (Tom McElroy), the senior Department of Athletics woman administrator (Lauren Anderson), and the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs (Judith Swift). The Board meets monthly during the academic year with top Department of Athletics administrators and invited coaches or other University staff members, as appropriate. The Board also holds a breakfast meeting in May attended by all coaches and key Department of Athletics personnel.

Although its mandate is broad, the Board is particularly focused on matters related to the academic integrity of the University's intercollegiate athletics program. At its April meeting, the Board was presented with the "Annual Report of Academic Support Services for Student-Athletes, 2004-2005," prepared by the Academic Support Services staff. Based on the data provided in that report (a copy is attached), I can report that intercollegiate athletes are generally performing as students in a satisfactory and often an outstanding manner. For example, during the Fall 2004 semester the average QPA for the University's 236 women intercollegiate athletes was 3.03, with 69 of those athletes earning placement on the Dean's List and only 12 being placed on probation. For the same semester the average QPA for the 273 men athletes was 2.74, with 47 on the Dean's List and 37 on probation. This latter number is an increase over the previous years, due primarily to a high probation rate among freshmen football players, and the Board has reviewed the proactive measures taken by the academic support staff to minimize the possibility of a recurrence of this situation in Fall 2005 (more on this below).

The aforementioned Annual Report includes a table presenting twenty-three years of data regarding the average GPA of student athletes and both the number of athletes on the Dean's List and the number on probation. This data shows that the academic performance of intercollegiate athletes has improved substantially during the past decade in comparison to the previous fifteen years. And, happily, the current year continues to reflect the recent higher standard of academic performance.

For some years now, the University has been required to submit six-year graduation rate data to the NCAA. The most recent data indicate that student athletes admitted as freshmen into the University from 1994 through 1997 graduated within six years at a rate of 60% compared to a 57% rate for all students admitted into the University as freshmen during the same four years. The equivalent graduation rate for minority student athletes over the same period was 51% versus a rate of 45% for all minority students. The equivalent rates over the same period for the high

visibility sports were 56% for men's basketball, 35% for women's basketball (due primarily to a high transfer rate), and 55% for football. Please understand that none of the current head coaches for these three teams was head coach when the athletes used to compile these graduation rates were admitted into the University.

Because the graduation rate statistic has many shortcomings as an indicator of academic integrity in the intercollegiate athletics program, the NCAA this year began requiring that member institutions calculate a complicated new measure, the Academic Progress Rate (APR), which is intended to provide a more inclusive semester-by-semester measure of student athlete progress toward a degree. The APR is calculated on a team-by-team basis and when a team falls below the NCAA-specified threshold score, that team will be penalized by a reduction in the number of scholarships it is allowed to provide. The APR system becomes official next year, but scores were developed for the current year to prepare institutions to use this measure. I am happy to report that the preliminary results suggest we will not be subject to a scholarship penalty for any of our teams.

Concerned about the noticeable increase in the number of men athletes placed on probation at the conclusion of the Fall 2004 semester, the Board requested that athletic Academic Support staff attend the February AAB meeting to discuss whether the athletics academic support staff is of sufficient size to meet the needs of student athletes. Detailed minutes of that meeting are attached, and they indicate that the discussion was broad ranging. In general, the Board was satisfied that the four Academic Support specialists are assisting at-risk and low performing students in an effective manner and that it reacted proactively and efficaciously to the aforementioned increase in the number of freshmen football players placed on probation. The Board concluded that other students are not being provided with enough advising services, but it did not believe, given the tight budget constraint under which the University is currently operating, that this unmet need warrants the addition of a full time advisor to the present staff (the advising staff is organizationally a unit of University College). The Board did recommend that all four of the present Academic Support specialists be placed on 12-month contracts (three are already on 12-month contracts) and that additional graduate student assistants be assigned to the unit in order to bring the University's advising and tutoring services for student athletes closer to the level of services being provided at comparable A-10 schools such as UMass.

The Board also reviewed an exceptional report from a member of the Women's Volleyball team, senior Marie Rolfe, who had conducted a survey designed to determine the extent to which interested and eligible-student athletes are prevented from enrolling in Honors Program courses because those courses are offered primarily at times that athletes are occupied with practice and other mandatory athletics activities. This is an important issues as an increasing number of non-scholarship athletes are now being lured (perhaps an inapt term) to the University—and thereby to their team—via their eligibility for a Centennial Scholarship. As indicated by the large number of athletes on the Dean's List every semester and the many impressive academic honors conferred upon athletes,\* many athletes—Ms. Rolfe discovered over 100—are eligible to enroll in the Honors Program, but few actually do so. Gerry Tyler, Acting Director of the Honors Program, also attended the meeting and indicated that Honors Program instructors would be encouraged to schedule their courses at times when they would be more accessible to eligible student athletes.

Other issues have also engaged the Board. This year the University is conducting a NCAA-mandated self-study of the intercollegiate athletics program (the last previous self-study was completed in 1997). Board members have participated as members of various subcommittees created to review specific aspects of the athletics program, specifically, ones relating to

governance and rules compliance, academic integrity, fiscal integrity, and equity, welfare and sportsmanship. The Board chose to focus on the issue of Title IX compliance at its March meeting. There is currently some uncertainty about compliance requirements, but at least three factors are important in determining whether a program is in compliance: (1) Are gender-specific sports participation opportunities proportional to the gender division of the student body (ours is currently 57% female)? (2) Are scholarships divided in a manner proportional to the gender division of the student body? and (3) Does the athletics budget provide gender-specific funding in proportion to the gender division of the student body? After reviewing data from the self-study relating to Title IX compliance, the Board decided to create a subcommittee to investigate and make recommendations to the Board regarding cost effective methods of achieving greater gender equity within the NCAA sports program. Despite the Board's wish to develop a recommendation in this area, the ad hoc committee has understandably decided to suspend its activities until an official Title IX audit is completed (this is scheduled to occur within the next several months) *and* a clear picture of the Department of Athletics strategic plan, which has yet to be announced, is obtained.

Much time at Board meetings this past year was devoted to the task of establishing a good working relationship with the new Director of Athletics, Tom McElroy. Two of the monthly meetings were devoted primarily to a sharing of information and ideas about the future place of athletics within URI. The Board also met with President Carothers to discuss how the Board might contribute more effectively to the development of athletics-related policy. At its December meeting, the board reviewed all proposed changes to the NCAA Operating Bylaws potentially impacting student athlete welfare and voted to support or oppose them. These votes were conveyed to President Carothers' designated agent for developing a University position on the NCAA proposals, NCAA Compliance Officer Paul Kassabian. The Board also reviewed the Ryan Center financial framework, but failed to agree upon a recommended alternative to the increase in the Student Fee designated for repayment of the Ryan Center bonds. At its final meeting, the Board reviewed Department of Athletics plans relating to the future of the URI football program. This was intended to be informational only.

There are two additional matters that merit mention. Long standing members of the Senate will recall that four years ago, the Senate enacted a new policy in regard to the scheduling of athletics competitions during the final exam period. Although the policy applies to all sports, its principal practical effect was to prevent the scheduling of men's and women's basketball games during reading days or the final exam period, excepting that games *are* permitted on Saturdays of the intra-exam period *not* designated as an exam day *if* the scheduled game does not involve travel extending beyond that day. Previously, the AAB had been authorized to recommend to the president that the rule be waived. That authority was eliminated in the revised language incorporated into the University Manual. This past year, due in part to poor anticipation by the basketball staff, but mostly due to the policy itself, the men's basketball team was required, unfortunately, to endure a period of eleven (11) days without a scheduled competition. Coaches have accepted this change reluctantly, but I believe the new policy is now an accepted part of the framework that all coaches employ in designing their schedules.

Another matter that continues to generate discussion is priority registration. Also four ago now, the Senate rejected a motion to allow athletes priority registration. It is important to understand that priority registration for athletes is an issue at every University; some allow it, some don't. It is also important to grasp that it makes sense for the institution to grant some athletes a "special" schedule. For example, the football team will be playing five away games during the Fall 2005 season. This means that every football player who is registered for MWF classes will miss their Friday classes five times during the course of the semester. It is obvious that this is a poor setup

from the point of view of the student-athlete *and* their instructor alike. Athletics recognizes, however, that not all student athletes require a special schedule every semester. The Board discussed this issue, brought to it by the Director of Athletics, and proposed that it advocate for the creation of a University wide framework/process in which students from all areas of the campus who reasonably anticipate they will be required to miss a number of classes due to participation in University-sponsored activities can apply for access to priority registration. The AAB will be bringing this initiative to the Senate early in the fall.

As a final matter, I want to call attention to the fact that the Department of Athletics operates within the same tight budgetary framework imposed on other divisions of the University. The University has directed the Director of Athletics to operate a Division I-AA athletics program as a member of the A-10 conference. To compete successfully at the A-10 level requires appropriate budgetary and institutional support. It is worth remembering that when the Director, the coaches, the staff, and most of all, *the athletes* of the Department of Athletics seek reasonable cooperation from others within the broader University community, they are not the ones who have decided to operate a I-AA, A-10 level athletics program. They are no more the proper recipient of hostile remarks or actions than the department chair who seeks aid from another department in order to maintain appropriate quality in the delivery of an academic program.

Minutes of 2004-2005 AAB meetings will be provided to individual senators upon request.

\*Joy Hess (Field Hockey), winner of the prestigious NCAA Postgraduate Scholarship; Katie Stailing (Women's Basketball), winner of the A. Robert Rainville Student Leadership Award, Kathy Guilfoyle (Women's Cross Country/Track & Field), selected as a University College Scholar; Safi Mojidi (Women's Basketball), recipient of the URI Black Scholar Award; Cindy Smith (Women's Cross Country), Atlantic 10 Conference Cross Country Student-Athlete of the Year, Joy Hess (Field Hockey), Melanie Kasperek (Women's Soccer), Academic All-American Teams; Emily Anderson (Women's Cross Country/Track & Field), Amy Brown (Field Hockey), Kyle Edwards (Football), Colin Gallagher (Football), Megan Karsparek (Women's Soccer), Melanie Kasperek (Women's Soccer), Drew Owens (Football), Cindi Smith (Women's Cross Country), Heidi Westerling (Women's Cross Country/Track & Field, Adam Zucconi (Men's Track & Field), A-10 Academic All-Conference Teams.