

Report of the Athletics Advisory Board to the Faculty Senate
24 April 2008

In offering this brief report, I am compelled to start by saying, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." That became abundantly clear as I reviewed the work of the AAB this year and re-read the annual reports for the last several years.

I was particularly struck by what former AAB chair Yngve Ramstad wrote in 2006:

. . . the Department of Athletics operates within the same extremely tight budgetary framework imposed on other divisions of the University. The University has directed the Director of Athletics to operate a Division I athletics program as a member of the A-10 conference. It is extremely difficult to compete successfully at the A-10 level without adequate budgetary and institutional support. As evidenced by the University's consistent [success] . . . the administrators, coaches, and support staff of the Department of Athletics are clearly doing an outstanding job of maintaining a competitive sports program under trying budgetary circumstances—and the members of the AAB want this fact to be recognized. *Significantly, competitive success is being achieved while maintaining a high level of academic integrity within the athletics program.* It is worth remembering that the Director, the coaches, the staff, and most of all, *the student-athletes* . . . are not the ones who have decided the University will operate a Division I, A-10 level athletics program, with all that this entails (such as the necessity of being absent from class in order to participate in a scheduled competition). When they seek assistance or appropriate accommodation, they are no more the proper recipients of hostile remarks or actions than the department chair who seeks assistance from other University programs and personnel in order to maintain appropriate quality in the delivery of an academic program.

On to the present:

- In late summer, a new Athletic Director, Thorr Bjorn, was appointed. Two members of the AAB – John Boulmetis and myself – served on that search committee. (More on this momentarily.)

- Our student-athletes (there are more than 500!) continue to perform well in the classroom. For the Spring 2007 semester, their cumulative gpa was 2.88 and 22 percent were named to the Dean's List. For Fall 2007, the cumulative gpa was 2.82 and 27 percent were named to the

Dean's List. These students were recognized during a Jan. 30 ceremony that included stirring remarks by Jill Anderson of the softball team and Damien Gresko of the football team. (Six percent of student-athletes were on academic probation after spring '07 and 8 percent after the fall semester.)

- Our athletes' accomplishments continue to be recognized on and off the campus. A complete list is attached to the written version of this report. Of particular note are three recipients of the President's Award for Student Excellence; a Rainville Student Leadership Award winner and a nominee; a Phi Beta Kappa inductee; and 12 Phi Eta Sigma freshman honor society inductees.
- A major concern of the NCAA is whether an institution operates its sports program with academic integrity. Several years ago, the NCAA 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 maximum number of scholarships it is allowed to provide. I am happy to report that the APR of all our NCAA teams was above the penalty threshold. By the way, APR data is public information that can be accessed via the NCAA web site.
- The NCAA also requires data from institutions in order to calculate a Graduation Success Rate for scholarship athletes. The GSR differs from the federally mandated graduate-rate methodology in that it counts transfers in and out of an institution. The latest figures showed that URI had a 78 percent six-year GSR for student-athletes who began college from 1997-2000. The federal rate for that period was 65 percent for student-athletes and 57 percent for all students. Again, this is public information available on the NCAA web site.
- The AAB was kept apprised of and discussed Athletic Department plans related to budget cuts. Over the last number of years, a variety of scenarios had been presented to the board, which expressed support for the department's decisions even as it acknowledged their difficulty.
- The board was involved in reviewing and revising, and ultimately endorsed, a proposed Student Athlete Code of Conduct, which is intended to be formalized for 2008-09.

- The board reviewed relevant sections of the University Manual and proposed some minor changes.
- There have been a number of complaints about an excessive number of missed classes by some student-athletes, particularly baseball players. The issue of missed classes has been discussed regularly over the years. It should be noted that the Early Registration policy approved by the Senate a year ago has helped alleviate some scheduling problems for many student-athletes (and some other students involved in university-sanctioned events). It also should be noted that the matter of scheduling athletic contests in a way that minimizes missed class time is complex and is not the same for all sports; indeed, it is not the same for all participants on a particular team. When the A-10 Faculty Athletics Representatives met in March, we discussed this issue at length. The conference has changed the way it gathers this data, and we are hopeful that more useful information will be available to guide conference planning. In the meantime, the FAR, the AAB and the Athletics Department are working together to insure that when it comes to the piece of scheduling URI has control over, every attempt is made to minimize the potential harm done to student-athletes.
- The board received its annual report from the Academic Advising staff this morning; in March we met with the NCAA Compliance Coordinator. No serious concerns emerged in either arena.
- To date, the board has received no requests from intercollegiate or club teams for permission to compete during the Final Exam period.

[Before I make a recommendation on behalf of the board, I would like to introduce Athletic Director Thorr Bjorn, and in doing so acknowledge how much the AAB has enjoyed getting to know him and working with him.]

**Prepared by Barbara F. Luebke
for the members of the AAB:
John Boulmetis, Bryan Blissmer, Yvette Harps-Logan,
Gerald McKinney (alumnus), Thomas Parker (undergraduate student),
Jack Szczepanski (graduate student)**

2007-08 Academic / Service / Leaderships Award Winners

□

NCAA National Leadership Conference

Grace Hedstrom (Women's Tennis), Participant
David Kennedy (Men's Track & Field), finalist
Natatia Nugent (Women's Track & Field), finalist
Kahiem Seawright (Men's Basketball), finalist

□

Academic All-American Teams

Damien Gresko (Football), ESPN the Magazine/CoSIDA Academic All-America Second Team

□

Academic All-Region/All-District Teams

Brian Giannecchini (Football), ESPN the Magazine/CoSIDA Academic All-America District I
Damien Gresko (Football), ESPN the Magazine/CoSIDA Academic All-America District I

□

Rhode Island Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women Distinguished Student-Athlete Award

Jill Anderson (Softball)

□

Atlantic 10 Academic All Conference Teams

Brian Alexander (Men's Indoor Track & Field)
Thomas Barek (Men's Indoor Track & Field)
Jimmy Baron (Men's Basketball)
Michael Bernardo (Men's Indoor Track & Field)
Stephanie Gregory (Women's Indoor Track & Field)
Stephen Mateka (Men's Indoor Track & Field)
Jeannie Records (Field Hockey)
Ryan Sheatsley (Men's Swimming & Diving)

□

Colonial Athletic Association Academic All Conference Teams

Fran Dempsey (Football)
Brian Giannecchini (Football)
Damien Gresko (Football)
Stephen Moll (Football)
D.J. Stefkovich (Football)
Mark Stolte (Football)
Greg Wicks (Football)

□

Football Championship Subdivision Athletic Directors Association Academic All-Star Team

Brian Giannecchini (Football), Division I Academic All-Star Team

URI President's Award for Student Excellence

Jeannie Records (Field Hockey), International Business
Lauren Shea (Volleyball), Environmental Economics & Management
Ryan Sheatsley (Men's Swimming & Diving), Mechanical Engineering

□

A. Robert Rainville Student Leadership Award

Jill Anderson (Softball) – Winner
Ryan McCarthy (Men's Track & Field) -- Nominee

**Richard Vangermeersch Award (URI College of Business Administration)**

Presented to the top undergraduate Accounting students

Damien Gresko (Football)

**Althea Gibson Award**

Safiatu K. Mojidi (Women's Basketball)

Whitney Hollis (Women's Basketball)

**Jackie Robinson Award**

Adrian Owen (Football)

William Daniels (Men's Basketball)

**Sojourner Truth Award**

David Bell (Men's Track & Field)

**Onyx Senior Honor Society**

Safiatu K. Mojidi (Women's Basketball)

**Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society**

Jill Anderson (Softball)

**Phi Eta Sigma (Freshman Honor Society)**

Elise Boissoneau (Field Hockey)

Robert Deering (Men's Swimming & Diving)

Rosmin Ennis (Women's Swimming & Diving)

Melissa Flynn (Women's Swimming & Diving)

Rachelle Green (Rowing)

Chelsey Hawes (Rowing)

Nicholai Hill (Men's Tennis)

Kathryn Howroyd (Women's Soccer)

John Kelly (Golf)

Brittany Pelsue (Women's Track & Field/Cross Country)

Nicholas Sanborn (Men's Track & Field)

Erika Sloan (Gymnastics)

**Chi Alpha Sigma (National College Athlete Honor Society)**

Joseph Abarr* (Baseball)

Tanja Licina* (Women's Basketball)

Nanci Jeannie Records (Field Hockey)

Francis Dempsey* (Football)

Bryan Giannecchini (Football)

Damien Gresko (Football)

Mark Stevens* (Golf)

Jamie Reyell* (Gymnastics)

Lauren Wasilewski* (Gymnastics)

Karin Fulkerson* (Rowing)

Lauren Killea (Rowing)
Beth McArdle (Rowing)
Rebecca Melesciuc (Rowing)
Linnea Rowse (Rowing)
Lucy Sumners (Rowing)
Thorunn Jonsdottir (Women's Soccer)
Jill Anderson (Softball)
Ryan Sheatsley (Men's Swimming & Diving)
Matthew Zrada* (Men's Swimming & Diving)
Haley Johnson (Men's Swimming & Diving)
Kelly Mohr (Men's Swimming & Diving)
Grace Hedstrom* (Women's Tennis)
Thomas Barek (Men's Track & Field)
Kevin Hopper (Men's Track & Field)
Jaymeson Kumm* (Men's Cross Country)
Stephen Mateka (Men's Track & Field)
Stephanie Gregory* (Women's Track & Field)
Caitlin Hurley (Women's Track & Field)
Jessica Lehmann* (Women's Track & Field)
Kathryn Salisbury* (Women's Track & Field)
Lauren Shea (Volleyball)

* New inductees