

Minutes: Faculty Senate Athletics Committee meeting – January 30, 2012

Those in attendance were Wanda Costen, Steve Waller, Lane Morris, Dan Murphy (FAR), Donna Thomas (Director of the Thornton Center), Kelly Grieve (student athlete), John Koontz.

Agenda was a report by Wanda Costen on the most recent meeting of the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics. For background, “the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA; the Coalition) is an alliance of faculty senates from NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) schools. COIA’s mission is to provide a national faculty voice on intercollegiate sports issues.”

Wanda reported that eleven institutions nationwide have athletics department that are self-supporting. The University of Tennessee is one of those eleven. While that is good for the academic side of things, the committee’s belief is that it has contributed to a lack of interest in the business activities associated with athletics. While this is fine given the present circumstances, should there be a role for faculty involvement in oversight of athletics.

A variety of issues were discussed including the perceived lack of a strong connection between athletics and academics, i.e. an apparent loss of a sense of partnership between the two.

The three major issues raised at the COIA meeting were discussed, including:

- a. “pay for play” and scholarship support that covers the cost of attending
- b. the collegiate model of athletics including
 - a. the possibility of four year scholarships rather than year to year
 - b. how infractions are dealt with the penalties imposed – penalties should be assigned to coaches
- c. changes in how progression and graduation rates are used.

Among the concerns raised for our campus include the observation that student-athletes are engaged many different types of activities beyond their classes or their particular sport but very few of these involve interactions with faculty. Athletics would like to see more faculty involvement with the student athletes.

A continuing issue that the Thornton Center staff regards as a significant challenge for the student athlete is the absence of an excused absence policy. Virtually all sports have attendance policies in place for the student athletes. In some cases these are very strict: miss a class for no good reason and you miss an event. In other words class attendance is considered very important. However, being a student athlete oftentimes requires being gone from campus and not able to attend class. This pertains not just to a student athlete but to any student who is participating in an out of town event in which they are representing the university. There is no excused absence policy stating that professors ought to work with the student to find a way for the student to make up any work missed while representing the university.

Other topics that were considered relevant to any student, not just the student-athlete, include the paucity of online courses that are available. Another is the practice changing the time of the class as it appears in the time-table. For instance, a class is scheduled to meet M-F but is changed to meet fewer times per week for longer class periods. This precludes the student from taking two classes in the morning (or afternoon). Students with commitments for the 2nd half of the day are limited to only 1 class option when a faculty member changes the published class time. This is true for students who have jobs, internships or student-athletes. A third is the poor level of faculty response to the “early alert” system for students, including student-athletes.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 27, 3:45 pm in the Thornton Center.