

FS Athletics Committee Meeting – 11/09/2020

Attending: Bonnie Ownley, Matt Harris, Greg Kaplan, Sarah Lamb, Harrison Meadows, Chris Parigger, Rachelle Scott, Joe Scogin, Aaron Smith, Sylvia Trendafilova, and Reid Sigmon

The FS Athletics Committee met to discuss three agenda items:

1. Impact of current learning modalities (especially online) on student-athletes
2. Election impact on student-athletes
3. Financial impact of Covid-19 on Athletics Department

Reid Sigmon, the Deputy Athletics Director/Chief Operating Officer joined us to provide insight on agenda item 3.

- Matt Harris, a faculty senator representing Haslam College, is currently acting as the Faculty Athletics Representative because Don Bruce is on sabbatical. Matt shared the new proposal, advocated by the Provost Office, related to grade change options when students had been directly impacted by Covid-19. There are likely constraints at the State level that would affect scholarship eligibility. Brief discussion of the proposal followed, knowing that this would be discussed more fully in the upcoming Senate meetings (11/16).

Agenda Item 1 - Impact of current learning modalities (especially online) on student-athletes.

- Joe Scogin shared information from a survey of a group of student athletes (SAs) that was shared with the Chancellor's Athletics Board. He asked SAs what the semester had been like, and asked for feedback on how the semester was going now. He shared that fall semester had been harder on everyone than spring semester for many reasons. From a teaching modality perspective, he reported that many students were "over it" in terms of staring at a screen, and wanting to engage again. There were a handful of students who liked it, especially the flexibility and opportunity to manage their own time.
- Communication challenges - There has not been enough time to get into a routine with communication. Chaos has been more frequent. There is inconsistency in expectations. There have been so many changes. Some instructors use multiple means of communication: email, Canvas, and apps like GroupMe. For one course, you might have 3 to 4 different modes of communication to update them about class schedule and assignments. Students had trouble piecing everything together if they did not check all modes of communication.
- Course modality - Courses changed from asynchronous to synchronous with arbitrary meeting times arranged. This created time conflicts for SAs who had fixed schedules. The hybrid model also presented inconsistent meeting times. Feedback from SAs was that the majority of faculty were very accommodating, but there were about 25% who put students in a bind. Students were struggling with "large class" engagement.
- Expectations and assignments - It could be challenging to figure out which communication mode for class was correct with regards to assignments. Some faculty gave quizzes after the zoom meeting and gave students a limited time to complete it, but students had another class to follow that one. Schedule disruptions were also created for students who had gone through isolation or quarantine, and some had done that more than three times. There were also many changes that students had to navigate. If they got behind, the course did not stop, and they felt overwhelmed.
- Matt Harris said that part of the challenge is that some faculty are teaching classes that they have never taught before. Sometimes students do not let faculty know right away that there is a problem related to Covid-19. Joe shared that he teaches a capstone course that took about three semesters to get it to the place that it was good for the students and good for him. It is sometimes difficult to get feedback from students on how the class is doing until the end. Patience for all is good.
- Chris Parigger shared that it is easier to teach graduate students with the new delivery modalities than undergraduates. Bonnie shared that graduate students, especially international ones, also had other challenges, particularly in relation to Visas. Chris mentioned that recording classes made it easier to accommodate students who had Covid-19 or had been exposed. Joe said that they had many international SAs and it had been difficult to get them into the country this year. Joe shared that recommendations in terms of traveling home for the holidays had been

challenging. International students had been told that they may not be able to come back into the country if they leave. But that will be very challenging for them if they do not have an opportunity to see family over the holidays.

Agenda item 2 – Impact of election on student-athletes.

- SAs are relieved that the election is over. Watching and waiting for results has been challenging. There were a range of emotions about it. The SAs were encouraged to engage with Student Life. The most positive thing is that students have asked questions and learned more about government and elections and how the process works. Students who engaged learned more, for many it was the first time they voted. Reid said that Joe and his staff did a great job with nonpartisan voter education, which included webinars and team meetings. The effort occurred in Athletic Departments across the country.

Agenda item 3 - Financial impact of Covid-19 on Athletics Department.

- Reid Sigmon stated that the Athletics Department is 8 months into the pandemic, which included the last 4 months of the 2019-20 academic year. They had significant revenue reductions for 2019-20 due to NCAA reductions and loss of funds from baseball and softball tickets. But staff worked on reducing spending, and they ended up with a slight deficit for 2019-20. They have \$10.5M in reserves.
- For 2020-21, due to the capacity restrictions for football and basketball, there will be significant revenue reductions, about a \$40M gap. They have focused on essential and critical spending, and on student athletes. On the expense side, they asked every team and every department to take a 25% budget reduction, which they have done. This included reduced travel party sizes, more regional travel, and less flights. The NCAA has had a recruiting dead period since March, which will go through the end of December, and may be extended. There have been no offers on campus recruiting, which has resulted in travel savings. There have been no professional conferences and deferred maintenance is emergency only. They have also instituted digital ticketing for football and basketball games. On the personnel side, they have a hiring freeze with 14 open positions. They created a salary reduction program with staff. For anyone making over \$50,000, they had a 5% reduction, and above \$150,000, a 10% reduction.
- There will be increased costs of \$2.5M for Covid-19 testing; currently they are averaging over 1,000 tests per week to meet the medical task force requirements.
- In addition, an ongoing court case (Alston vs. NCAA) may bring additional costs. [*Additional information - U.S. District Judge Claudia Wilken issued a permanent injunction in March, 2019, ruling in the case of West Virginia running back, Shawne Alston versus the NCAA. The current ruling is that the NCAA's limits on compensation for athletes in major college football and basketball were in violation of antitrust laws and an unreasonable restraint on trade. The NCAA wants the Supreme Court to kill that injunction, which could lead to more money going to athletes from schools, not third parties, if the payments are related to education, such as with internships, postgraduate scholarships, or cash for academic achievements – Brent Schrottenboer / USA Today, Oct 15, 2020.*]
- The NCAA extended eligibility for spring student athletes and seniors and they will be able to come back another year, which will cost another \$750,000. For the coming year, fall and winter sport student athletes will have the same opportunity in upcoming fiscal years.
- On the revenue side, they will have one-time revenue options with both licensing and financing options with the SEC office. They are focusing on additional donor options and are working to close the gap. Their goal is to limit this to one fiscal year if possible. They announced their basketball ticket plan last week with 18% capacity for Thompson-Boling Arena, which is about 4,000 people. They have 14,000-15,000 season ticket holders, so they will be working through that issue with fans. There may also be loans available from the campus.
- A question was asked about how the smaller sports responded to a 25% reduction. Reid responded that most of the cost savings were based on travel cuts. Competition has been conference only. All Athletic Departments across the country are going through this. Joe emphasized that the UT Athletics Department is focusing on retaining people. The importance of reserves has been realized going forward.