

March 3, 2010

University Council

Report from the Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics (CIA) (2009-2010)

Members: Jerry Gale (Chair), Mark Cooney, Tony Capomacchia, Robert Moser, Lonnie Brown, Margaret Robinson, Jere Morehead (in 2009), David Shipley (starting in 2010) and Shana Eisenstadt & David Koonin (student representatives).

This is our summary report covering six meetings with members of the Athletic Association and student athletes. On October 9, 2009 we met with Assistant Athletic Directors Eric Baumgartner and Glada Horvat. Mr. Baumgartner presented on academic fraud. He presented examples from around the country and discussed how our athletic program and University is very pro-active in this regard. This self-monitoring includes monthly reports to the President's office and anonymous surveys with student athletes. He discussed issues of compliance to NCAA rules and what is countable and non-countable in terms of student athletes' time and activities. Mr. Baumgartner presented in detail the issue that the University of Michigan currently is addressing (voluntary versus required practices) and how the athletic program at UGA monitors this issue to avoid violating this policy.

Ms. Glada Horvat presented on the Academic Progress Rate (APR) and tracking each student of each sport in terms of academic success and graduation. This information is required to be reported and is posted by the NCAA. Based on the report and Ms. Horvat's presentation the committee was extremely impressed with how the Georgia Athletic Association is doing in this area and in particular how diligent and rigorous Ms. Horvat is tracking this information.

Also on 10/9/09 committee members received copies of the completed survey of the Athletic Integration into Academics in order to have a clearer sense of the scope of the Athletic Association in regards to activities with students and issues that our committee needs to examine.

Dr. Carla Williams (Associate Athletic Director) presented (12/10/09) on Title IX and equity issues in sports at UGA. A detailed handout was provided of public information about both men's and women's sport at UGA including the number of student athletes and coaches for each sport. Carla presented on graduation rates of student athletes, again providing a detailed handout documenting both the freshman cohort graduation rate (4 year cycle) and the Student Athletic Graduation rate (GSR) which is the one recognized by NCAA. Basketball has had the greatest problem in graduation rates (18% graduation rate), though with few student athletes on the team, it will take significant time (years) for them to statistically improve their rate. It was noted that Damon Evans (Athletic Director), about 4 years ago, initiated a policy that a

student athlete having 3 missed or unexcused classes will result in a 10% loss of playing time, and each missed class after that would be another 10% of the season. Additionally, students missing appointments with their academic counselor would also result in loss of playing time. Dr. Williams noted how this has dramatically helped reduce missed classes. It was also noted there is an impressive increase of academic support for both current student athletes as well as former athletes. Letters were sent out to former student athletes offering them financial support to finish their degree. Students who graduate before their 5 year eligibility are up can use remaining scholarship money to pay for graduate school. Also at this meeting the Athletic Association revenues and expenses were discussed, with a detailed summary provided. It was noted that the UGA Athletic Association is one of about 5 programs nationally that actually is in the black. That is attributed to a large degree to actions of Damon Evan over the past 5 years.

Ted White (Director of the Rankin Smith Center), who oversees academic support services presented on January 28, 2010 to the committee on the Academic Support Program. Included in the presentation were details about the facility, resources, staff, programs for students and the computer based tracking and reporting system (portal system). There are 8 academic counselors, all with master's degrees and three subject specialists to work with students. There are 50 tutors who work with students. These tutors include graduate students as well as retired faculty. There are also 30 mentors (graduate students and local teachers) who support students. Every freshman has a mentor. The Rankin Smith Building is six years old and includes state-of-the-art technology and multiple rooms for meetings. Students who are traveling for an away game are provided computers to keep up with their course work and to work with their academic counselor. If a student needs to take a test while away from the University, the athletic program will hire an independent person to proctor the test. Mr. White's talk highlighted the Athletic Association's emphasis on education and supporting academic success.

The standard they have established as their goal, to have all athlete students maintain a 3.0 GPA and a 15 Credit/term, is higher than what NCAA requires. This past year 50% of student athletes had a GPA of 3.0 or higher, including 50% of the freshmen class. Twelve teams overall had a GPA of 3.0 or higher and the football team achieved a 2.87 overall GPA. Mr. White acknowledged that the men's basketball team is significantly below this average though they have improved both the men's basketball and football teams' averages each year over the past four years. Their policy of restricting student's playing time if they miss three classes, don't attend academic support meetings or are performing below a C in a class is having a cultural change on the athletic program. Students have learned to take this policy seriously (several years ago two men's basketball players were suspended for games due to their absences), and with the computer portal system, staff and coaches are able to track daily each student's attendance for classes (there are classroom checkers who monitor attendance), meetings with academic support staff and course grades. This information is inputted daily (they do have

student releases to get this information from course instructors) and monitored by coaches and academic support staff (with only appropriate personnel having access to a particular student).

Damon Evan (Athletic Director) met with the committee on February 17, 2009 as well as presented to members of the UGA Teaching Academy at a Lunch and Learn meeting in which the committee attended. Damon articulated his vision of the athletic program and the value that he places on academic success. He stated that his model for an athletic program stresses academic success ahead of sport performance success. While “winning is important” he is “passionate” and “committed” to students academic success and their success in life after they leave the university. His policy of “if you don’t attend class, you don’t play” is unique in the SEC and even nationally. Similarly to wanting each sport team to go undefeated and win 100% of their games, Damon noted that his efforts are to achieve a 100% graduation rate for every student athlete. In his efforts to encourage students to graduate he has contacted students who have left the program without a degree to get them to return to the university. His efforts have reached back to students from over 10 years ago. The athletic program does provide financial support to support former students even though these students do not count in graduation rates for the NCAA reports. Damon noted that the Circle of Honor, one of the highest honors of student athletes at UGA is restricted to student athletes who graduate (hence Hershel Walker is still not a member). Damon also noted the athletic program’s goal is to graduate student athletes in 3 ½ years in order to increase their chance of completion, and to help some student athletes with scholarships for graduate school. Additionally he noted that coaches receive a bonus if students on their team are in the top ¼ of academic performance.

On February 23, 2010 the committee met with members of the UGA Athletic Academic Support Staff. There were 13 members of the academic support staff present (including counselors, learning specialists, and coordinators of tutors). Their years of service in their work ranged from 2 to 14 years. A number of them work specifically with student athletes of particular sports.

Topics we discussed included how they work with students to schedule courses and how they help students manage their time of courses, study and athletics. They self-define themselves as “accountability specialists” noting how their focus is to make each student accountable for his/her academic learning, and not to do the work for them. While all the staff and tutors support this attitude and approach to working with student athletes, there is a need for ongoing monitoring and training of tutors (typically paid graduate students) to make sure they follow this approach. They are always vigilant to not crossing the line of doing the work for student athletes, and they do not allow tutors to work with students on ‘graded homework.’

They talked about useful the Portal System is, but it is only as good as the information posted. They stated how it is very important to them to have up to date information about each student’s progress in their courses. While they have student permission (Buckley releases) to log onto ELC to get course information, and permission to talk to faculty, they are limited to

what information is posted on ELC, and what faculty actually report to them. Different colleges and departments use different platforms for courses, and this has made it more difficult for the academic support staff to access information. They noted that having mid-term grades would be incredibly useful for them to monitor student's progress. They noted the "need to educate faculty" about what they do, how they do things and to involve faculty in this progress. They have seen improvement in this area with faculty providing information, but there is still the need for improvement and to reach out to new faculty when they come to the university. They noted how the changes in Area B of undergraduate curriculum requirements have affected them as there is less flexibility for students in taking electives. Also, having minuses and pluses with grades have added more challenges, as a C- can affect a student's eligibility in a number of ways. As many student athletes are not on full athletic scholarship (many sports only offer partial scholarships), they rely on HOPE to sustain their education.

On February 23, 2010 the committee also met separately with student athletes. There were nine student athletes attending, representing track & field, volleyball, men's golf, soccer, women's basketball, swimming & diving, and football. Students ranged from second year students to 5<sup>th</sup> year students. Some of the students had completed competing in their sport, and were finishing their degrees. The students all highlighted the limited free time that they have in and out of season with the demands of classes, study time, practice time, training and travel.

Their days can start as early as 4:45 to 6:00 with workouts, classes from about 9:00 to 2:00, more practice, and then study time from 7 to 10 pm. Their schedules make it very difficult for them to get into specific courses, many of which are required in their major. They also have to deal with travel time when their team is traveling away from Athens. Travel time can vary depending on the sport and season (golf for example can require 5-6 days of travel), and this can have serious impact on students' ability to take specific courses.

They noted that while many professors will work with them missing classes, some professors do not. For these classes, a missed class that is required of them for their sport, is considered an unexcused absence from their class and affects their grade. While they try to avoid this problem these courses/professors with taking classes in the summer, the university structure of when classes are offered can make some classes almost impossible to take (foreign language for example). They noted there are some faculty who seem to 'not like athletes' and this too can create problems at times.

They noted that "class checkers hold us accountable" and they appreciate having them there to make sure they are attending class. Several of the students are in their 5<sup>th</sup> year and while they are no longer active in their sport, they are still supported in their academics. They appreciate that support. Several of the students noted they plan on attending graduate school. The

students noted that while they all took freshmen classes that prepared them for professional and career goals, at that early stage of their academic development it was hard to make sense of it all. They said they would value this support and knowledge again when they are seniors. A number of the students did note that there could be greater support in helping them prepare and apply to graduate schools. There was also the need expressed for more support for international students and the transfer of credit from their home country, reducing the need to repeat courses taken at a University in another country. They also noted a high turnover of academic counselors, which has made it difficult for them. Though they also acknowledged the reason of the turnover is that these people are highly qualified and they are advancing their careers with higher level jobs at other universities. The students stated that it would help them a lot if professors would not count their team travel days (required of them) as if it were an unexcused absence. They noted that the English department in particular does this. Student athletes would like faculty to understand their commitment to athletics mirrors other student's commitment to academics and many of them chose to come to UGA because of its commitment to academic success.

On March 1 we met with three coaches. These included Meghan Boenig, Equestrians Coach (60 student athletes, 8 years at UGA), Mark Richt, Football Coach (125 student athletes, nine years at UGA) and Patrick Baker, Women's Soccer Coach (28 student athletes, 5 years at UGA). All three coaches praised the academic advisors and their commitment to each student athlete's academic success. The coaches each noted they (and their staff) used the portal regularly, and had weekly updates on each student's academic progress. They used this information to encourage and support students. It was stated that the "academic staff puts together the plan for each student's success" and that we (the coaches) "provide the muscle" to make it work. This was in reference to the policy of three missed classes (or appointments with academic support) leading to automatic sport competition suspension. The coaches noted some challenges to this policy, as their information was only as good as what is reported by faculty and ELC. They all noted that if faculty provided more consistent and up to date progress grades of student athletes, the coaches would work to make the students accountable.

Coach Richt noted that a number of his student athletes, while intellectually capable, come in underprepared academically, lacking good study habits, and were not supported or motivated to do well academically. While these students meet NCAA standards they are below UGA admission standards. He noted that these students have benefited from the "excellent academic support" of the staff which helps most of them achieve about a ½ grade better than expected. Coach Richt added that only rarely does a student produce below their expected GPA. All three coaches reported the goal of having students graduate in 3 ½ years. The coaches noted there are challenges for their students to take specific courses to meet particular academic program requirements (due to the intersection of course scheduling and attendance

policies with student athletes travel schedule) many student athletes take summer courses and Maymester courses to achieve the 3 ½ year graduation goal. It was noted that part of the reason for this 3 ½ policy is that many student athletes are very active in their senior year trying to have their best athletic performance, and completing most of their courses by this time helps these students.

Acknowledgement and appreciation was given to Ted White and his staff for the outstanding job they do for student athletes. The repeated term used by all three coaches is that the staff of the Rankin Smith center work to make student athletes accountable. It was noted that while some students might not make it, none “will fall through the cracks.” Coach Richt noted that he meets with members of the academic admissions committee on a regular basis.

In summarizing our meeting with Damon Evans, student athletes, academic support staff and coaches the committee is very impressed with the dedication of the Athletic Association to strive for academic excellence of student athletes. While there are excellent resources for academic support for students (the facility, staff and procedures may be one of the best in the country) there are still concerns regarding the heavy time commitment of student athletes. In particular, some sports require extensive travel time being away from campus and some students may have to miss up to 8-9 classes a semester. On the most part student athletes are committed to academic success as well as athletic success, but at times curriculum scheduling and the inability to take particular courses hinder their academic progress. There is a need for improved methods and strategies to inform the UGA community about the commitment of the Athletic Association for academic success, the many excellent staff and resources that are available to student athletes and how student athletes are made accountable in their learning process.

Respectfully submitted

Jerry Gale, PhD  
Chair of the Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics  
March 10, 2010