

Athletic Council:

Annual Report, 2000-2001

The Athletic Council for 2000-2001 consisted of the following members: Greg Pfitzer (chair and faculty representative), Viviana Rangil (faculty), Eric Weller (Fall 2000, faculty; replaced in Spring 2001 by Mary Correa, faculty), Chuck Joseph (for the Vice-President of Academic Affairs and the Dean of the Faculty), Don Hastings (for the Dean of Student Affairs), Rebecca Booker (student, '03) and Ned Merrick (student, '02). Tim Brown, Athletic Director, served as an ex-officio (non-voting) member of the Council and was replaced during his sabbatical by Assistant Athletics Director, Katherine De Lorenzo. Committee meetings were attended regularly as well by student interns Mary Meager and Scott Backer and by Women's Basketball and Softball Coach, Erika Gillis.

The committee is charged in the faculty handbook with recommending to the Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty policies regarding the Skidmore athletic program, "including the determination of the scope and level of competition in intercollegiate, club, and intramural sports; eligibility rules; establishment of priorities for the athletic program; and such other matters as may be brought to the Council's attention by the Athletic Director or by any of the constituent groups of the college community."

The Athletic Council met monthly (and on occasion twice a month) throughout the academic year 2000-2001 to discuss issues related to the faculty mandate outlined above. Below is a brief summary of the most important of matters discussed in the first and second semesters.

NCAA Self-Study

The Athletic Council spent time in its fall meetings discussing the "NCAA Division III: Institutional Self-Study Guide to Enhance Integrity in Intercollegiate Athletics." The study is designed to assist colleges in assessing the role of athletics in an institution's educational mission. It contains many thought-provoking questions related to "Institutional Purpose and Athletics Philosophy," "Principles of Sportsmanship and Ethical Conduct," "Institutional Control and Accountability of Athletics Program Finances," "Sports Medicine," etc. The Athletic Council reviewed and endorsed answers provided by the Athletics Department to questions posed in the guide and helped formulate institutional responses to broader, all-college issues.

An area of concern prompted by these discussions and carried over into regular business of the Council was gender-equity. Skidmore completed a Gender-Equity Survey in 1998, addressing matters of participation in sports by male and female students, revenues and

expenditures in equity categories and coaching assignments by gender. While Skidmore is in compliance with NCAA standards and Title IX requirements in most areas, members of the Council expressed concern about two important areas of non-compliance: 1) the disparity between the men's baseball facilities and the women's softball field, and 2) the number of women's coaches who are two-sport coaches as opposed to their counterparts who coach just one sport. Presentations were made in the late winter and late spring by members of the Athletics Department to the Administration about these deficiencies. There will be a review of athletic programming by the College next fall, so no action was taken on these matters this year, but the Athletic Council feels strongly that both issues must be prominent in the discussions in order to ensure that gender-equity balances are being maintained.

The Athletic Council also met to discuss and recommend to the Athletic Director positions on matters to be taken up by the NCAA Division III Presidents and Management Councils at its annual meeting in January, including end-of-season tournaments and commencement conflicts, out of season workouts, and approval of a financial aid compliance process.

Strategic Planning Initiative

The Athletic Council participated in the strategic planning initiative, beginning with a special planning roundtable devoted to Athletics in November and continuing with a response to the President's call in April for consideration of three long-range goals associated with the planning process: 1) to reinforce and enhance student/faculty relationships; 2) to strengthen the spirit and experience of community and diversity, and 3) to closely link the learning and living elements of the student experience. The Athletic Council recommended that the College encourage a better understanding of the relationship between class work and athletic participation; better communication among students, coaches and faculty about scheduling conflicts related to athletic competition, and a broader consideration of budget issues associated with Athletic Department equipment and operating costs. The Council would also like to find ways to encourage more members of the Skidmore community to support intercollegiate athletics as well as to encourage faculty, staff and students to value exercise as an important part of a healthy lifestyle and the daily work regimen. To this end the Council urged the College to do more to encourage faculty and staff to use the sports facilities, including expanding the hours that exercise areas are available and supporting wellness programs and exercise classes where possible.

Academic Eligibility

Much of the spring term was devoted to consideration of a proposal made by Jon Ramsey for "Clarifying and Modifying Academic Eligibility Standards for Skidmore Student Athletes." Dean Ramsey has been working for a number of years on this proposal designed to help students "balance the commitments of time and discipline required for academic and athletic success." The report raises important issues relevant to the work of the Athletic Council and asks questions such as: "Exactly how will we apply NCAA Division III eligibility policies when a student athlete is in serious academic jeopardy--that is, either on 'probation' or not meeting 'minimal continuation standards'?" "By what means, and by whose authority, will we decide on an individual athlete's eligibility to practice and compete?" and "What is the best balance of time commitments between a student's academic and athletic endeavors? What is the best strategy for achieving academic success when the student athlete is in serious academic jeopardy?"

The committee discussed at length these important questions and recommended to Dean Ramsey that he continue with the practice that is currently operational by which the records of individual students in academic difficulty are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and where determinations of eligibility are made by the Dean of Studies office in compliance with NCAA guidelines in consultation with the Athletics Director. However, members of the Council felt strongly that any provision that would declare a student/athlete ineligible for intercollegiate athletics because of academic difficulties should be applied to all students and in all other areas of co-curricular life. The Council is in agreement that intercollegiate athletics should not be singled out as the only area of co-curricular restriction, when, in fact, there may be other activities that are equally distracting to students (athletes or non-athletes) in academic difficulty. Hence, while the Council acknowledges the need for academic standards for eligibility, it requests that such standards be applied to all students evenly and with respect to all areas of co-curricular activity under the College's control.

It should be noted that this position represents a compromise of sorts for members of the Athletic Council. Some on the committee believed that students should not be restricted in any endeavors (athletic or otherwise) despite academic difficulties. They argued that students should take responsibility for their own actions, and that ultimately at Skidmore (as in life outside Skidmore) it is the students who must decide how they will spend their time. In addition, they are concerned that any such restrictions might violate fundamental student rights. Others on the Council believed that academic standards should determine eligibility for intercollegiate sports as a first step toward reducing distractions for students in academic difficulty and that the minimum standard for participation should be raised. Once a student drops below a certain standard, these others argued, he or she should be excluded automatically from intercollegiate athletics independent of

other areas of co-curricular activity. The Council's compromise position on the Ramsey proposal recognizes that decisions on these matters can and should be made on a case-by-case basis but insists that an even standard be applied across the board.

Non-Varsity Sports

The Council was involved as well this year in discussions of non-varsity sporting activities. It considered a proposal from the Ski Club for varsity status and in the process revisited arguments for a women's varsity hockey team. Members of the Outing Club put forward suggestions for kayaking clinics and renewed discussions of a climbing wall, while others in the community called for improvements to the fitness room in the sports facility. On this latter note, it was reported by Chuck Joseph that the budget for maintenance of equipment in the fitness room was tied (somewhat inexplicably) to the intramurals budget, a line too small to handle maintenance and replacement costs. The result was many complaints from users of the fitness room about equipment that was not maintained well. Fortunately, a substantial gift was given to the college by a donor late this spring providing funds to purchase and maintain equipment for the fitness room.

Pool and Weight Room Availability

The Athletic Council received many e-mails concerning the availability of the pool and weight room during times when students are not on campus. During breaks when students leave campus during the academic year (for lengthy periods of time in December, January, May and August), these athletic facilities often are closed to recreational users. Part of the problem is the lack of available monitors when students are not on campus. In addition, facilities such as the pool are budgeted through the Athletics department until the end of classes only, while Special Programs does not assume responsibility for them until summer school begins. While these stretches of time are convenient for doing maintenance on a facility like the pool, they also constitute long periods of inactivity and unwarranted closure. Employees of the College who are working during periods when students are not on campus and who depend on these facilities year round, feel as if they are being kept from them unfairly. Members of the Athletics Council plan to continue to challenge aggressively these policies of closure, because they reflect so importantly on questions of access and ownership of college-wide athletic facilities.

So, it was a busy but productive year for the Athletic Council. If you have any questions about this annual report, please direct them to the summer liaison for the Athletic Council, Greg Pfitzer. Viviana Rangil will be chairing the committee for the 2001-2002 academic year and Phyllis Roth will be the new faculty representative replacing Eric

Weller/Mary Correa, both of whom served the Council wonderfully this past year.

As outgoing chair, I would like to thank interns Mary Meager and Scott Backer for taking detailed minutes at our sometimes convoluted meetings. In addition, on behalf of the Athletic Council, I would like to extend best wishes to Katherine De Lorenzo and Erika Gillis who will be leaving Skidmore after this semester. Their hard work on behalf of the Athletic Council this year was appreciated greatly.

Respectfully Submitted

Greg Pfitzer, Chair (2000-2001)