

Athletic Council Annual Report for Academic Year 2019–2020

Athletic Council (AC) met six times in the 2019–2020 academic year.

AC completed its standard business beginning with the annual evaluation of three physical activity instructors. The council's three elected faculty members spent time observing the classes of Jessica Turner, Joe Martin, and Nate Simms, and followed with written evaluations submitted to Gail Cummings-Danson (Director of Athletics).

The council annually selects the recipient of the Tim Brown Award, which highlights and celebrates athletic and academic excellence of Skidmore's highly impressive student-athletes. Out of a truly stellar pool of candidates, Renee Karchere was awarded the honor in recognition of her outstanding achievement.

Gail reports on all legislation presented at the National College Athletics Association (NCAA) before national voting on measures occurs and offers exposition on any changes that could potentially affect Division III schools. This academic year there were three potential policy changes that were of particular interest to Skidmore. The first was a proposed change to allow institutions to provide snacks and nutritional supplement on campus (e.g., locker rooms, etc.). The previous policy allowed institutions to provide nutritional supplementation and snacks on travel days and at home games when student athletes miss a meal. We were in favor of this policy change given the tight timeline some students experience between, for example, a class and practice, and the NCAA Division III national vote did indeed support this change. The second potential policy change was that equestrian was being proposed as an emerging NCAA sport. We were not in support of this due to the rules and regulations it would impose, and this proposal was not supported by the national vote. Lastly, there was legislation being voted on that would allow student athletes in leadership positions to have conversations with coaches outside of the competitive season. As hoped, this policy was approved.

The council also has annual meetings with several members of the Skidmore community to keep the committee updated on current policies affecting Athletics. This year we met with Sean Campbell, the Collyer Vice President for Advancement, and Catherine DeLorenzo, Director of Admissions.

Sean provided an update on the overall Capital Campaign (we achieved our goal of \$210 million) and the funds that have been raised for Athletics as part of the Campaign (we are a bit behind in funding for Athletics). Given that Sean joined us for our April meeting, we also spent time talking about the adjustments to fundraising efforts imposed by the COVID crisis. There was a pause in fundraising for the Skidmore Fund and fund raising with parents, and there was a greater emphasis on personalized outreach to major individual donors and of course the Emergency Student Fund. The shift in approach also involved creating a new webpage to engage alumni and using faculty webinars and newsletters. It is also important to note that Athletics is responsible for a significant amount of fundraising each year, specifically \$150,000. This presents a tremendous burden on student-athletes who must also raise funds for spring

break competitions, some of which are part of their regular schedule. It is worth noting that profits from summer camps and building rentals do not contribute to the fundraising, but go back to the College.

The council has, in the past, asked Catherine DeLorenzo for a report in the spring semester, but we moved this report to the fall to help council members field conversations and dispel myths about admissions processes for rated athletes (the process is similar to Filene and Porter Scholars). All applications are read by two admissions counselors, and early decision applicants have between 3–4 reads. The committee discussed the difficult task coaches face recruiting student-athletes based on both their athletic potential and their ability to successfully navigate standard admissions criteria. Catherine’s report provided updated student-athlete statistics from last spring - there were 413 rated athletes on the 1–4 scale; 247 applied; 177 admitted. Admissions also implemented the use of SLATE—a communication product that helps Admissions more effectively communicate with students about missing pieces of their applications. This has made the admissions process more efficient and has helped response time when Admissions sends out decisions. Another significant change in the admissions process is that in the past colleges could not incentivize for early decision (financial aid, preferred housing, etc.). The Department of Justice (DOJ) recently ruled that this practice was an anti-trust issue. The DOJ found that these regulations limited competition among colleges, and early decision incentivizing is now legal. Colleges can also continue to communicate with and recruit students who have enrolled and put down a deposit at a different institution. They can also continue to communicate with students about transferring after their first year. Institutions cannot talk with peer institutions about this practice nor inquire whether they’ll abide by or change policies with peer institutions. This will likely have an impact on future recruitment and admissions processes.

The AC spent a significant amount of time discussing the Athletic Facilities project following the challenging community conversation in November 2019. Phase 1 of the Athletics Facilities Working Group’s proposal included a new weight room/fitness center for the entire campus community and a multipurpose indoor space that includes four indoor tennis courts, which can also be used as an indoor practice area for lacrosse/baseball/softball. Phase 1 was approved by the Board of Trustees with a target completion of 2021. Phase 2 of the project would include an ice hockey rink. Individuals and committees, including the AC, voiced concerns regarding the perceived lack of comprehensive communication about the Athletics project, and additional discussions were organized. The entire project is now on hold due to the COVID crisis, and it is unknown when the project will be relaunched. This delay poses significant challenges for Athletics, and, in particular, our nationally-ranked tennis teams. Our outdoor courts are not in a condition to host matches, and we will likely have to hold matches inside at the YMCA. Gail is undertaking conversations with the YMCA about this and continuing to rent courts in the winter for practices.

The AC wants to make note of another pressing facilities project – our equestrian facility. In particular, the indoor riding ring roof is in very poor condition and is a growing concern from both a safety and energy-consumption perspective.

The council also had discussions and follow up about specific faculty concerns, including:

- our Concussion Assessment and Management Protocol, which is NCAA compliant and includes a “Return to Learn” component that allows Athletics to work with SAS so that faculty can be educated about their students who have suffered a concussion.
- Gail’s meetings with each team to reiterate students’ obligation to communicate their scheduling conflicts with each of their professors early in the semester, to understand course policies regarding missed classes, and to prioritize academics.
- clear language and transparency in the recruiting process so that incoming students understand where they stand in terms of a team roster spot and that returning students understand that past participation doesn’t guarantee future participation on a team.

Due to conversations happening on FEC, the evolved misalignment of some AC policy and practice, and the NCAA requirement for self-studies, the AC spent time outlining a strategy for a self-study that will be conducted in 2020-2021. Components of the self-study likely will include:

- a review of policies, including physical activity instructor evaluation, general operating code, and other practices (e.g., posting meeting minutes, etc.).
- AC membership and the role of the AC in the College’s governance system.
- the role and responsibilities of the Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR).

We would like to close our report by acknowledging the significant impacts of the COVID crisis on our student-athletes and our valued staff in Athletics. The truncation of sports seasons, the financial impacts of lost summer programming, and the pause of the Athletic Facilities project are understandably frustrating, disappointing, and worrisome, and the AC voices our support of and gratitude for the important, multi-faceted contributions Athletics makes to the Skidmore community.

Athletic Council Members 2019–2020

Cerri Banks (Dean of Students and Vice President for Student Affairs)

Megan Buchanan (Associate Director of Athletics)

Gail Cummings-Danson (Director of Athletics)

Kyle Hughson (Student-Athlete Representative)

Karen Kellogg (Environmental Studies & Sciences, Chair)

Jason Ohlberg (Dance, LV Spring 2020)

Michael Orr (Dean of the Faculty and Vice President for Academic Affairs)

T.H. Reynolds (Health and Human Physiological Sciences)

Bernardo Rios (Anthropology, replacement for Ohlberg Spring 2020)

Flagg Taylor (Political Science, FAR)

*This year concludes Jason Ohlberg’s three-year term on AC. In fall 2020, Jason Breeves will join AC and T.H. Reynolds will serve as Chair.