

2014-15 Report, University Athletics Academic Advisory Committee
Submitted by Mary E. Adams, Chair

This committee is comprised of faculty, staff, and (hopefully) student members. We work in three subcommittees:

Equity and Student Well-being:

Tommie Church, Leonard Clark, Anthony Walker

Academic Integrity and Compliance:

Barbara Michaelides, Brett Bennett, Carl Thameling, Tom DeNardin, Anthony Malta

Governance and Fiscal Integrity:

Mary Adams, Bob Cage, James Greenlaw

In my first year as chair, the committee focused on five issues:

- 1) understanding the needs of our student athletes
- 2) closer analysis of travel schedules
- 3) meeting the goals of our mission statement
- 4) increased education for members
- 5) recommendations concerning membership rotation

1) Understanding the Needs of Our Student Athletes

Our Equity and Student Well-being Subcmte is moving in a positive direction. Tommie Church, Anthony Walker, and Leonard Clark are working to define the issues most pressing for student athletes. While their work has led to our committee's increased understanding of student athletes, I am most proud that they have brought to our attention the need for facility improvements. The Governance and Fiscal Integrity Subcmte now has an ongoing dialog with Dr. Wickstrom concerning issues like track improvements. We also spearheaded an effort to equip travel busses with Wi-Fi.

2) Closer Analysis of Travel Schedules

With the help of Brett Bennett, we have become far more aware of the issues associated with travel schedules. Rather than focusing merely on the missed class time, we now evaluate the bigger picture, including days between road trips, exact return time, and how those issues might impact a player's academic performance.

3) Meeting the Goals of our Mission Statement

On December 10, 2012 we adopted the following mission statement:

"The mission of the University Athletic Academic Advisory Committee (UAAAC) is to support the President and the Athletic Director in establishing and maintaining an environment conducive to both academic and athletic success, while ensuring the quality of student life for the student-athletes at ULM."

While we have never strayed from our focus on the student athletes, my goal as incoming chair was to improve the overall relationship between athletics and academics by increasing faculty participation in athletic events. Our minutes from Oct. 14, 2014 state, “Mary said that a major goal for the upcoming year is better academic->athletic interaction. This could include attendance by faculty at special athletic events. Kevin Price volunteered to serve as a lead in this improved academic-> athletic interaction endeavor.”

My goal of sponsoring an event that brought together faculty and athletics was not successful as only members of UAAAC attended the meet/greet for returning women’s basketball players. Going forward, we want to sponsor an event with greater appeal, perhaps something during Homecoming. In our next attempt, I hope to work with Dr. Wickstrom to provide free or reduced ticket pricing to faculty and their families for such an event.

4) Increased Education for Committee Members

Because our discussions center, so often, on APR, we wanted to ensure that our group understood APR as thoroughly as possible. According to our minutes from Dec. 9, 2014, “Meghan Mazza gave a summary regarding compliance terms including APR and Eligibility. She also elaborated on the point system used to score APR. Minimum APR is 930... Brian Wickstrom said that even though the minimum APR is 930, the coaches’ target is 940.” The demonstration and ensuing discussion really helped to clarify the process for everyone on the committee. I hope to have a similar presentation each semester, perhaps focusing on issues like transfer rules, the role of the FAR, and how each subcmte operates. Such presentations will improve member awareness while helping to more quickly educate new members.

5) Recommendations Concerning Membership Rotation

It is the group’s consensus that UAAAC is unlike other university-level committees. We feel that it takes far longer to develop an understanding of the committee, which speaks in a discourse heavy in NCAA rules. We have had several discussions concerning the difficulty of getting people up to speed. **It is, therefore, our recommendation that this committee’s membership rotate on an as-needed basis.** Speaking from experience, I do not think I felt prepared to take a leadership role during those first two years.

The committee’s membership also needs to be addressed in light of university re-organization. In September of 2012, the committee voted on the following structure:

“Based on the predominating majors of student athletes, the cmte determined the following:

- our cmte should be composed of 8 faculty members
- two of these members should represent Arts & Sciences
- two should represent Business
- two should represent Education, with at least one coming from Kinesiology
- one should represent Health Sciences
- one should represent Pharmacy

The cmte will seek new members who are both interested in serving and interested in learning more about athletic-academic issues.”

Now that we have three colleges, our colleges seem to more equally serve the student athletes. **We recommend returning to an equal distribution of our membership across colleges. We recommend having three faculty per college. This would increase our membership from 8 to 9 members, but this would be particularly helpful in the long run, when the work of the task force is assumed by one of our subcommittees.**

Currently, we have 3 members who can represent CAES (Adams, Thameling, Clark). We have 3 members from CHPS (Walker, Church, Bennett). We have 1 member from CBSS (De Nardin). During our first fall meeting (September 1, 2015), we will gather recommendations for two additional members from CBSS and forward those to Dr. Bruno.

Student membership has been a problem. According to the minutes from April 3, 2012, “With the exception of Cassel’s attendance at the first meeting, we have seen neither student member.” No student member has attended since that record. In October of 2012, the committee even considered inviting both student-athlete and non-athlete student members, as Tasha Fisher stated that some universities have such a policy. We did not pursue that change. In April of 2013, the minutes indicate that the committee “renewed its commitment to including one male and one female student athlete.” Yet we did not find student members who were willing to show up.

For the coming year, I have selected two students, approved by Dr. Wickstrom, who seem to reflect the sense of responsibility and integrity we are seeking. I plan to give these students official tasks, which they will report on during the meetings. I will also assign them as members of the Equity and Student Well-being Subcmte, where they will have an active voice in raising and addressing student-athlete concerns. I hope that this greater sense of responsibility will lead to a better dialogue between the committee and student-athletes.