

IAC Report for 2007-08

During the 2007-08 academic year, the IAC grappled with a number of compelling, controversial issues. It was a period of important expansion for the UO Athletic Department, and the IAC sought to enhance communication with the latter in the wake of numerous issues emerging. The IAC sought to be proactive, to be a voice for problem-solving this year, though we often found ourselves stymied to do much besides listen.

Before most faculty and students had returned for fall term 2007, the IAC was informed of the Athletic Department's decision to drop men's wrestling as a sport, and to add men's baseball and women's competitive cheer. The IAC sought to probe the Athletic Department to explain why these two sports in particular – baseball, which often has weekday games causing student athletes to miss many classes during the season, and competitive cheer, which is one of the most high-injury sports for women athletes – were added. The IAC was informed that many UO supporters were enthusiastic about restoring baseball, and that research had been conducted to support adding the women's sport of competitive cheer. The IAC regrets that it was never privy to being able to see that research, despite repeated requests.

The ongoing issue of building a new basketball arena quickly accelerated as the UO Athletic Department sought to move forward more aggressively with its arena planning. Much of the year – indeed, a portion of most IAC meetings – was spent reviewing or discussing different components of the basketball arena, and especially the funding package for its construction and ongoing operations. The IAC was visited by members of the UO Senate Subcommittee on arena financing as well as by advisors and consultants to the Athletic Department and the UO President's office. An important precedent emerged for the IAC in this process: we voted on Senate Resolutions concerning the arena and, as such, agreed that it was appropriate for the IAC to issue formal opinions. We urge that this process of periodically meeting with representatives of the Senate Subcommittee on arena financing be continued, as there is much to gain by sharing expertise between the Senate and the IAC for the overall betterment of the UO.

In addition to the recognition that the IAC has a mandate to weigh in on important matters concerning athletics at the UO was the question of the structure of the IAC itself. The IAC's charge stipulates that an Executive Committee must be formed; it makes no note of other committees. This year, the IAC revived the practice of an ExCom being actively engaged in helping set the agenda for meetings and in being an additional liaison with the Athletic Department. In addition, we agreed the IAC could have distinct subcommittees: the subcommittee on baseball met with relative success (see below), although the subcommittee on women's sports never met due to lack of availability on the part of Athletic Department staff. We sought to have a meeting with the IAC ExCom and the Athletic Department's ExCom, but with the exception of one member of the Athletic Department staff who was able to attend, this effort was also stymied. We recommend that the IAC ExCom meet with the Athletic Department's ExCom at least once per term, as this will go far in enhancing communication and strengthening ties between the two entities.

The subcommittee on baseball was formed to discuss the renewal of the UO baseball program. Joe Giansante was the point person from the Athletic Department, and the IAC appreciated that he was completely forthcoming with information. Some of the major areas of focus were:

- *the new stadium*: the IAC baseball subcommittee was able to weigh in on the decision of where to site the stadium in the middle of the process. IAC members agreed with the decision of the Autzen site, ultimately chosen, because of the convenience for the players (who need every minute they can get to keep up with academics and their training), the connection to the campus, the savings because of existing infrastructure, and the educational opportunities which could arise from full control over operations. The IAC also appreciated that it appears that the financial planning was prudently done.
- *academic pressures*: baseball is a sport whose in-season players miss a large number of classes. While the NCAA has recently put limits on the calendar to counter growth in the number of baseball games, Academic Progress Reports (APRs) will also force programs to make wise choices about scheduling. The IAC made the basic point that simply too many classes are missed now, in this sport and others, to be compatible with high-level academic performance, and that how the baseball team is performing academically should be revisited by the IAC in the future. IAC members suggested it is worth exploring issues of scheduling and possible win-win solutions such as increasing the number of summer course offerings. The latter issue – of improving communication about the academic needs of student athletes in the summer and the possibility of the Athletic Department underwrite the cost of offering some additional relevant summer school classes – needs to be pursued in the future. From the limited discussion we had with the Athletic Department, it was evident that greater clarification about the unique way in which summer school operates must be provided both to the Athletic Department and to some members of the IAC, as well as a substantive discussion of needs, costs and benefits. For example, student athletes could likely benefit greatly from the weekend, intensive one-week, and four week formats offered in summer school. Departments cannot offer courses simply hoping student athletes will attend; greater collaboration and planning with the Athletic Department can result in enhanced summer school course offerings that meet student athletes' academic needs, and particularly those of the student athlete baseball players.
- *internships*: the formation of the baseball program seems like a good opportunity to bring in undergraduate workers, possibly enlarging the number of departments with a relationship with the Athletic Department. The Athletic Department has been receptive to this idea; we urge the IAC to pursue it further in the future.

Five other important issues emerged this academic year. First was the construction of a new student athlete learning center, which had been under discussion for some time. Faculty on the IAC were very concerned that as this kind of facility is central to the university's academic mission, part of it should be available for public use. IAC members were pleased to see the Athletic Department be responsive to and accommodate this concern as it set aside the ground floor – including a large lecture hall – for general university usage when not otherwise committed to Athletic Department events.

A second issue was the IMG College-Multi Media Rights Agreement. In February, the Athletic Department informed the IAC that in partnership with Oregon Sports Network (OSN) and IMG College, the UO had agreed to an extension and new partnership for multi-media marketing rights worth over \$67 million over the next ten years. Details were laid out and discussed, with the bottom line noted that the annual rights fees will provide the Athletic Department nearly triple the amount of the existing contract “with a guaranteed cash amount of \$56,218,000, and will help Oregon Athletics remain self-sufficient with a goal of becoming self-sustaining as it focuses efforts on major projects including a proposed basketball arena and new baseball park, as well as possible renovations to Autzen stadium.”

Third, in response to faculty input, the IAC asked the Athletic Department in November to present information about the status of student football ticket distribution. Alternative arrangements had been made for a physical distribution plan for the Civil War game in 2007 in response to issues surrounding students missing class in order to stand in line for their tickets. At that time, the Athletic Department said they were intending to put in place a digital distribution system for the 2008 season, although details and other issues had not been formalized. We asked the Athletic Department to return to the IAC in May of 2008; at that time, they were now able to report on the digital distribution plan that will be in effect for the fall 2008 season. The IAC found the digital distribution plan both sound and equitable, and commend the Athletic Department for figuring out a way to distribute tickets and not intrude on class time. While the Athletic Department more than likely was on this path independently, they certainly were responsive to faculty/IAC feedback and we used the forum of the IAC appropriately to discuss and resolve the issue.

The fourth additional issue the IAC undertook this academic year addressed replacing the Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR), Jim O’Fallon, when he retires. The IAC appreciated President Frohnmeyer’s discussion of the process and hopes that it will be involved, at least to some extent, in the final decision-making process.

Finally, while we had been frustrated in our efforts to discuss the possibility of adding an additional women’s sport with Athletic Department staff, IAC members engaged in a valuable exchange with Bev Smith (women’s basketball head coach) and Tara Erickson (women’s soccer coach) on prospects for stronger ties between the academic side of the university and women’s sports. Earlier this year, there had been a celebration of Title IX, a result of a collaboration between women’s athletics and the Center for the Study of Women in Society (CSWS). IAC members at the meeting supported having further collaborations of this nature; we urge the IAC to undertake and support such collaborations in the future.

There were two changes in the IAC’s relationship with the Athletic Department that deeply concerned IAC members. The first was the lack of attendance by the Athletic Director at the majority of IAC meetings despite that the schedule had been agreed upon in advance between the Athletic Director and the chair of the IAC. To underscore the importance and integrity of the IAC, the Athletic Director needs to place attendance at these meetings as a top priority. The second change was the failure of the Athletic Department to include members of the IAC on the

search committees for the new baseball and competitive cheer coaches: the IAC was completely excluded on the former, and only invited the day before the interviews to participate on the latter. We believe this change is very unwise: it is important for prospective coaches to see the importance placed on academics at the UO by the presence of a faculty member on the search committee. Faculty have served on numerous search committees in the Athletic Department, including the appointment of the last Athletic Director (Bill Moos), the volleyball coach, the soccer coach, etc. These are important precedents of collaboration, and the IAC hopes that the exclusion of faculty from the two searches conducted this year is an anomaly, and not a new precedent.

On behalf of the IAC, I would like to reiterate that the IAC would like to be of even greater assistance to the Athletic Department in the future, to brainstorm with Athletic Department staff on issues of mutual concern:

- ▶ how best to integrate student athletes into other arenas of the university?
- ▶ how best to achieve a balance between academics and athletics at the UO?
- ▶ how best can the Athletic Department's state profile enhance the recognition of the importance of the UO's academic contributions to the state?
- ▶ How can we, together, excel at both?

We see ourselves as players on the same team, and look forward to future collaboration between the IAC and the Athletic Department.

Professor Anita M. Weiss, IAC Chairperson 2007-08