

2020-2021 Annual Report to Academic Council from the Athletic Council Chair
Submitted by Linda Franzoni, Chair
April 15, 2021

The Athletic Council is made up of the following membership categories: Faculty (7, including representation from Pratt, Law, Fuqua, Medicine, Sanford, and Trinity); Administrators (5, including - Deans, Student Affairs, University Counsel, and Exec VP); Students (6, including Club Sports, DSG, GPSC, Student-Athletes); Alumni (3), Trustees (2); and other Ex-Officio Members (including the Registrar, Financial Aid Director, OIE, Admissions, and Athletics staff).

The Athletic Council has the following subcommittees:

The Executive Committee, consisting of a member from each of the constituents that were just mentioned. It meets with the President, Provost, and Senior leadership in Athletics to determine agenda items for the year.

The Academic Committee, consisting of the faculty members that are on the Council. That Committee is concerned with the academic experience of the student-athletes. It meets with the Dean of Admissions, as well as with Academic Support Staff and Colleagues in the Trinity College Assessment Office to review the academic performance of student-athletes. This subcommittee meets twice a year.

The Compliance Committee, chaired by the Faculty Athletic Rep, discusses new and pending NCAA legislation as well as reviews any recent violations of NCAA regulations that have occurred at Duke. This subcommittee meets each semester.

The Exec Committee met in October with the President, Provost, and Senior leadership in Athletics to determine agenda items for the 2020-21 academic year. At that meeting four general categories of interest emerged: COVID-19, Finances, Student-Athlete Experience, and Becoming Better Educated/Informed about Collegiate Athletics.

The Fall Athletic Council meeting included the following:

- a report from the Athletics Department on the protocols that were being used to protect Duke's student-athletes, coaches, and the university population from COVID-19, while also allowing student-athletes to practice and compete.
- a report on the financial impact that COVID-19 has had on the Athletics Dept
- a student-athlete panel discussing their personal experiences, academically and athletically
- and an introduction to Duke's new women's basketball coach, Kara Lawson.

The Meeting of the Athletic Council took place over Zoom on November 20, 2020. President Price began the meeting, giving an overview of role of the Council and its various subcommittees, and thanking the Council for its service. He mentioned that he was proud of the Duke Community for the way that it has handled the pandemic. Kevin White, Director of Athletics, next addressed the group and explained that the department was working hard to give the student-athletes the opportunity to play and practice their sports, while at the same time protect their health and safety.

Financial Report

At the April 2020 Athletic Council meeting, three projected financial scenarios were presented as possibilities for 2020-21: quasi-normal (which included a shortfall), “middle ground” (a larger, approximately doubled shortfall), and “extreme” (which was about five times the quasi-normal shortfall). At the November 2020 meeting, Mitch Moser talked about how these scenarios were revised in June 2020 and the projected shortfall was slightly larger than the “middle ground” scenario. At that time, the Department instituted a number of cost-cutting measures to make up for the projected loss of revenue. They reduced some of the financial aid by eliminating summer school, reduced the operating expenses, put spending “guardrails” in place (for example purchases and travel), and reduced salaries (no raises, no contribution to retirement, vacancies went unfilled, etc.). In September 2020, with new information regarding football and basketball, an additional loss was to be expected and more expense mitigations were put into place. In addition, the development team in the Athletics Department began a fundraising campaign called “more than a game” to bring in revenue from philanthropy. At the time of our meeting in Nov 2020, the projected losses were closer to the scenario that had been labeled “extreme” back in April 2020. The Department has not only incurred losses due to reduced tv revenue, loss of bowl game revenue, etc., but it has also incurred large expenses due to COVID-19 testing and safety measures.

COVID-19 Protocols

Bob Wiseman explained the logistics involved in protecting the student-athletes and staff from COVID-19, while allowing them to practice and compete in their sports. As many at Duke know, the university adopted the hashtags: #keeplearning, and #keepteaching - - the Athletics Department created #keepplaying. Student-athletes were kept in their own “bubbles” which meant socially isolating with teammates. Students in fall sports were tested every day, while students in spring sports were tested twice a week. Travel arrangements were modified. Competition schedules were reduced. For the Olympic Sports most of the NCAA championships were moved to the spring. For the spring, the sports schedules were deliberately built to have “off weeks” in case competitions needed to be rescheduled.

Student-Athlete Experience During COVID-19

The student athletes painted a picture of social isolation and team bonding. They felt that they had grown closer to their teammates due to the “bubbles” that they were living in. They felt safe, grateful, and supported by Duke. Most of the students had all of their classes on Zoom and reported that online classes have pros and cons. In terms of scheduling around their sports’ time commitments, online classes offered more flexibility and fewer logistical problems like travel time between classes or from practice to class. The fact that classes were recorded for viewing later was also a benefit of the online delivery mode. The downside was that students didn’t have as much opportunity to interact with their professors as they would have in-person because the Zoom meetings often ended abruptly when the lecture time was over. Student-athletes who used the tutoring services reported that a side benefit of having those on Zoom was the ability to record the session and return to it later if they wanted a refresher.

Academic Committee of Athletic Council

On Nov 13, 2020, the Academic Committee met with Christoph Guttentag, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions. Christoph explained how well he and his staff work with coaches to vet prospects. Christoph believes that he has been responsive to coaches while at the same time recognizing that he has a responsibility to the university as a whole. If a prospect is denied admission by Christoph, there is no appeal, that decision is final. When prospects are accepted, Admissions will send "likely letters," in case they are considering other schools at the same time. As has been his practice, Christoph interviews all men's basketball and football recruits himself, as part of the admissions process. This year he has been doing those interviews on Zoom and it has worked out very well because scheduling was much easier than when it was done in person as part of a recruitment visit. Due to the COVID pandemic, testing sites for SAT and ACT tests were often closed this year and Duke made the decision to become test-optional for admissions. The absence of standardized test scores did not have an impact on this year's class because many of the recruited student-athletes had taken these tests prior to the pandemic in order to become NCAA eligible and to gauge their potential for being recruited by certain schools. However next year, Christoph is expecting that the lack of standardized testing will have an effect on the admissions process for student-athlete prospects.

The spring meeting of the Academic subcommittee took place on March 22, 2021. At that meeting Martin Smith, Dean of Trinity College presented data on academic metrics, comparing student-athletes to non-athletes. The academic support provided to student-athletes comes from both their College and the Athletics Department. Academic deans receive mid-term grade reports and make recommendations, as they would for any student. Only as a last resort do they may recommend withdrawing from a class to avoid failing, most often they suggest tutoring or other academic support. In general, Duke student-athletes are academically very successful, and Duke often ranks among the top schools in terms of Academic All-Americans. When comparing majors chosen between athletes and non-athletes, there are differences that need further exploration, and that will be studied in more depth in the future. Also, student-athletes participate in certain learning experiences with less frequency than non-athletes, for example programs like FOCUS, Bass Connections, and Study Abroad are less subscribed by athletes than the overall Duke undergraduate population. More thought is needed on how to enable larger participation by student-athletes in some of these high impact academic programs.

Spring Athletic Council Meeting

This spring, the Athletic Council will meet on April 23, 2021. The agenda includes an update on finances, an update on Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) legislation, and a meeting with members of the Athletic Director Search Committee and Search Firm.

That concludes the 2020-2021 report from the Athletic Council, submitted on April 15, 2021.