REPORT OF THE AS&E COMMITTEE ON ATHLETICS, 2017-18 ACADEMIC YEAR

The Athletics Committee met twice in the Fall semester and once in the Spring semester. We carried over two major initiatives from the past year, an analysis of the approach of Tufts and the NESCAC to concussions and sub-concussive impacts and a continuation of efforts to initiate a faculty liaison program.

At the first meeting in the Fall (on 11/15/17), we elected co-chairs and selected Mary Glaser to be our NCAA representative. We then moved on to a summary of our previous meeting on the concussion issue and a discussion of steps forward. That discussion began with Nick Mitropoulos, the head trainer, and John Morris, Tufts Athletics Director, summarizing the current practice at Tufts and the recent history. While concerns about football stimulated faculty concerns about the issue, football has neither the highest number of concussions nor the highest rate per athlete participating. Further, in all sports training methods have been modified and the handling of potential concussions has been improved considerably.

The committee decided to generate a report to the faculty providing more data from Tufts and other NESCAC schools, summarizing what other schools are doing regarding concussions and sub-concussive impacts, and reviewing the research on the topics. Two subcommittees were formed, one assigned with the task of collecting data and information on practices and one tasked with reviewing the relevant research.

At the second meeting of the Fall (on 12/4/17), we discussed the status of the Faculty Liaison program. We had begun working with the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) in 2014-15 on the program. The goal of the program is to create a better flow of information between faculty and student athletes by having a member of the faculty directly connected to a given varsity team. The faculty member can serve as a mentor to team members, provide information and advice, and guide student athletes if and when they run into challenges and conflicts between academics and athletics. SAAC had created guidelines for the liaison program, but no faculty members had been matched with teams. The committee decided to pilot the program this year, with liaisons matched to three teams in the Spring season: Baseball (Steve Cohen), Softball (Mary Glaser), and Women’s Lacrosse (Tom Downes). Howard Wolf has also agreed to be a liaison to Men’s Soccer and Steve Hirch to Women’s Soccer next fall. Based on the results of the pilot program, we plan to make a report to the faculty and get feedback on the right steps to expand this program to as many teams as possible. We closed the meeting with John Morris summarizing the 2016-17 Annual Report of the Athletics Department.

At the Spring meeting (on 4/3/18) of the committee, the subcommittees tasked with providing information on concussions and sub-concussive impacts made their reports. The information-gathering subcommittee provided data on concussions at Tufts and on the evolution of practice at the university. Because club sports (particularly men’s and women’s rugby) have been more of a problem than team sports, we reviewed the evolution of practice for club sports and discussed potential future steps. We also tasked
the subcommittee with getting more information on concussion histories at other NESCAC schools, as well as the evolution of practice at those schools.

The subcommittee that reviewed the scientific literature noted that the consensus of those working in the field is that the literature is still in its earliest stages, with much still to be learned about the long-term impacts of concussions and sub-concussive impacts. The subcommittee’s reading of the selected parts of the recent literature was consistent with this consensus. Both subcommittees will continue their work into the Fall, with the intent of preparing a final report to the faculty.

The meeting closed with Mary Glaser and Tom Downes summarizing their experiences as faculty liaisons, along with reactions from student-athletes who were on teams with liaisons. The committee agreed that the pilot should continue, with additional liaisons being arranged for Fall and Winter teams. At a meeting next Fall, the committee will invite current liaisons to summarize their experience and suggest ways in which the program can be improved. Our plan is to finalize a report to the faculty by the end of the next academic year.

Submitted on behalf of the Athletics Committee,

Steven Hirsch/Classics, co-chair       Tom Downes/Economics, co-chair