REPORT OF THE AS&E COMMITTEE ON ATHLETICS, 2018-19 ACADEMIC YEAR

The Athletics Committee met twice each in the Fall and Spring semesters. 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 10/31/18), we elected co-chairs and selected Mary Glaser to be our NCAA representative. Steve Hirsch, one of the two co-chairs, updated the committee on the status of our report to the faculty on concussions. The committee agreed to a plan of having a more expansive discussion of the report on November 28th, when we would also develop a plan for drafting the final report to the faculty.

We then moved on to a discussion of the history of the faculty liaison program. The committee agreed that it would be valuable to meet with the current liaisons and the coaches of the teams that have liaisons. That meeting would give us a sense of what was working in the program, what needed to be modified, and what the next steps would be to extend the program to more sports and to formalize the process of matching faculty and teams.

We closed the meeting with a report from John Morris on the status of the athletic program. John reviewed the athletic and academic successes of the past year and covered the challenges going forward. He also summarized the Fall season up to that point, noting that several teams were moving on to the post-season.

At the second meeting of the Fall (on 11/28/18), we discussed the draft report on concussions. The data on concussions led the committee to the conclusion that, while the steps that had been taken to mitigate concussion risk in football have been successful, the club sports, particularly rugby, are a real problem. The committee discussed potential steps that could be taken to reduce concussions in rugby and other club sports. We laid out the goals of the final report, discussed steps that could be taken to make the report more accessible, and agreed that we would invite the University counsel to our first meeting of the Spring. At that meeting we would finalize the committee report, so that it could be brought to the faculty by the end of the Spring semester.

At the third meeting of the academic year (on 2/11/19), the committee worked to finalize the concussion report. University counsel, Dana Fleming, discussed the status of litigation against the NCAA and the NESCAC and answered other questions raised by the committee, including ones about club sports and insurance. We then reviewed the data we had on concussions by sport and decided to reach out to the NESCAC to get data on concussions that are reported to the conference. The meeting closed with a discussion of the recommendations that we would like to make to the faculty and of the steps that the co-chairs should take to make the final report more accessible.
The co-chairs worked with the committee and the Athletic Department to draft a final report. That report, which along with an Executive Summary and our presentation to the faculty can be found on the committee’s web site, was presented at the AS&E Faculty meeting on April 11th. The co-chairs provided an overview of the full report, which had made available to the faculty ahead of the meeting. In addition, President Monaco gave an update of the steps the NESCAC has taken to improve safety in both football and rugby. Going forward, the committee plans to monitor the prevalence of concussions in athletics and the current status of risk mitigation practices. We hope that the incoming Provost will take steps to carry through on the other recommendations that the committee made in its report.

At the final meeting of the year (on 4/21/19), the committee met with the coaches and faculty involved in the faculty liaison program. The coaches and liaisons agreed that pilot of the program has been a success. The discussion moved on to the steps that could be taken to strengthen the program, increase coverage to all sports, and make serving as a liaison a regularized part of faculty service. One suggestion for strengthening the relationship between liaisons and team members was to have liaisons serve as pre-major advisors to incoming recruited athletes. That suggestion and others were incorporated into a working document that introduces the liaison program and provides suggested guidelines for how the program should work. The meeting then turned to a discussion of strategies that could be used to identify liaisons. Current liaisons (there were 8 at the time of the meeting) had been identified by individual team members and had been approached by coaches or team captains. That was felt to be too ad hoc, particularly since most faculty and athletes were unaware of the existence of the liaison program. Those in attendance agreed that asking faculty to volunteer at the time they submit committee preferences could be a more fruitful strategy. The committee chairs have since reached out to the Committee on Committees to explore that option. Our hope is that the Committee on Committees will be able to make available the edited description of the liaison program, which can be found on the committee’s web site, along with a list of teams and current liaisons. Faculty could then volunteer to be liaisons at the same time they volunteer to serve on committees. The Athletics Department could then work with the Athletics Committee to assign interested faculty to teams and to monitor the success of the program.

Submitted on behalf of the Athletics Committee,

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