

Response to the  
Report of the Athletics  
Review Committee



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## INTRODUCTION

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On May 13, 2011, the Athletics Review Committee submitted to me its final report following three weeks of open discussion about its preliminary report of April 21, 2011. In transmitting the report along with copies of the numerous communications to the Committee from across the community, the Chair of the Committee, Richard R. Spies, emphasized the Committee's view that the report should not be considered piecemeal but that, rather, "the set of recommendations should be considered as a comprehensive and interconnected package." The final report arrived after I had advised the community that discussion and a decision on the recommendations would be suspended until fall 2011 to allow adequate time for student athletes, their supporters and others on campus to complete final academic work.

In a community where reviews are a common mechanism for examining existing practices and reports are routinely issued as a means of establishing new policies and revising existing ones, it has no doubt surprised many that the report elicited such strong reactions from so many sectors. Committee meetings, open forums, petitions, e-mails and letters, counter-proposals, and testimony at the Brown University Community Council revealed reactions that ranged across a wide spectrum of emotion and thought including anger, confusion, betrayal, disappointment, disagreement and impatience. While most of those who chose to communicate with the Committee and, later, with me argued against accepting some of the Committee's recommendations (particularly those concerning the elimination of certain team sports), some less vocal respondents insisted that the University should not be swayed by such emotions. Indeed, they said, it was finally time to impose some needed changes in athletics policy. These individuals frequently stressed that changes of this kind should have been instituted long ago but that the University leadership "lacked the courage" to face up to the pressure from those who support athletics.

Whatever reaction we may have seen and whatever opinions expressed, there is an important question that has animated this process from start to finish. It is a question that is larger than athletics and larger than any single area of university life. Every year, under the aegis of the Provost, the University conducts reviews of academic programs. Review panels include experts from outside the University and their reports and recommendations, used as a means of strengthening the program they examine, address challenging and sensitive issues that affect our ability to offer the best programs. The quality of these programs rests in large measure on our willingness to undertake such reviews and on our determination to implement sensible recommendations aimed at creating stronger and more competitive programs. Examining other areas in a similarly rigorous fashion is critical to the future of the University. The community should welcome such efforts and thank those who are willing to undertake this important work.

Having said that, there is an important dimension in which this review was unlike academic reviews. Understanding that athletics was likely to be of broad interest to the community, we designed this process to be deliberately more open and inclusive. Alumni and parents, faculty and students, standing committees and advisory councils, and other formal mechanisms for debate were augmented by inviting direct access to the Committee and the decision making process. That so many took advantage of this access to express their views offers abundant evidence of the meaningful way in which shared governance is embedded in the University's ethos. Often stuttering or painful in its exercise, this inclusiveness is a hallmark of the University's identity, leading ultimately to a sense of community that is deep, strong, and resilient. I am persuaded that a consequence of the difficult and, for some, divisive months behind us will

be a further deepening of that bond as a result of the University’s having invited the community into the discussion. We should never be afraid to examine our practices nor should we shrink from the criticism that should arise from these examinations. In the tradition of the best of university life, such inquiries should be acknowledged as the bedrock of our mission driven approach.

I am grateful to all those who participated in this process. The conclusions below are my own, informed by the Committee’s report, input from many contributors, meetings with a wide range of interlocutors, and the decades in which I have observed athletics in the context of university life. I will present these conclusions to the Corporation at the October 2011 meeting.

## PRINCIPLES OF IVY ATHLETICS

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Athletics at Brown is regulated by the Ivy League which, through a series of committees and a President’s Council, reviews and approves changes in policy intended to preserve the unique approach to Ivy sports as defined upon the establishment of the League. A 1954 Presidents Agreement amending the 1945 football agreement among Ivy institutions, reaffirmed clearly that

**“In each institution the academic authorities should control athletics.”<sup>1</sup>**

Just as importantly, the agreement places Ivy athletics further in context by defining principles related to recruiting, “representativeness,” and harmony with the university’s educational mission:

**“II. A The group affirms their conviction that under proper conditions intercollegiate competition in organized athletics offers desirable development and recreation for players and a healthy focus of collegiate loyalty. These conditions require that the players shall be truly representative of the student body and not composed of a group of specially recruited athletes. They further require that undue strain upon players and coaches be eliminated and that they be permitted to enjoy the game as participants in a form of recreational competition rather than as professional performers in public spectacles. In the total life of the campus, emphasis upon intercollegiate competition must be kept in harmony with the essential educational purposes of the institution.”<sup>2</sup>**

Those who would advance the interests of athletics at Brown should do so with these guidelines in mind:

1. The ability of academic authorities to control athletics must be considered inviolate;
2. players must be representative of the student body; and
3. athletics must be in harmony with the educational purposes of the University.

In considering the many opinions expressed about the size and scope of athletics at Brown, I have invariably turned to these principles to guide my findings and recommendations.

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 1 P.159, *Ivy Manual 2011-2012*  
 2 Ibid

## ACADEMIC OVERSIGHT

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It is not clear at this time that academic authorities are in fact sufficiently in control of athletics at Brown. While there are coaches who not only brilliantly mentor their athletes and consistently win competitions, contributing greatly to a sense of cohesion and pride among members of the Brown community, and while the administration in Athletics strives to ensure that we meet the goals of Ivy athletics, they need the support and help of academic officers and faculty to align athletic competition with our core educational goals.

Today, Athletics reports to the Vice President for Campus Life and Student Services, who, in turn, reports to the President. **The Dean of the College and Provost must be involved in monitoring the extent to which Athletics is aligned well with the University's academic mission. To accomplish this, the Dean of the College and the Vice President shall, on a regular basis, review with the Dean of Admission the representativeness of the athletes recruited to Brown and, if necessary, recommend to the Provost and President any needed changes in admission practices in the context of Ivy rules and competition. The Dean of the College and Vice President for Campus Life and Student Services should routinely examine issues such as excessive practice demands, absences from classes, and overall academic participation of athletes. The Dean will also determine the effectiveness of the academic advising and mentoring of athletes at Brown. Where problems are identified, the Athletic Director, coaches and teams should have an opportunity to clarify and address any problems.**

**In addition, where academic performance and harmonization with Brown's educational goals are at issue, it should be clear that this assessment rests primarily with the relevant academic officers: the Dean of the College and the Provost.**

**Further, no later than April 2012, the Dean of the College and Vice President for Campus Life and Student Services shall submit a plan to the Provost and President for how they will monitor these matters on an on-going basis, and this plan will be communicated to the faculty.**

## ADMISSION SLOTS FOR ATHLETES

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As a member of the League, Brown accepts participation in a competitive sports league. This league has become synonymous with academic excellence but it is nonetheless primarily an athletic league. If Brown is to be a member in good standing, we must seek to be competitive in a range of sports. As evidenced by the number of oversight committees and mechanisms in place on the campus and at the League-wide level, there is an extensive structure in place to ensure compliance of all universities with Ivy policies. However, there is considerable flexibility for universities to set higher standards than the League requires, based on their individual campus capacity and circumstances.

From the evidence I have seen and the testimony I have heard, many in our community believe that it is appropriate and timely to reduce the number of slots allotted to athletic recruits. They believe that it is possible, through prudent measures, to do so without decreasing the overall league competitiveness of team sports at Brown. I agree with this view. At this time, Brown's percentage of athletic recruits (an average of 13% over the previous four years) is well within the range of its Ivy peers. Nevertheless, I agree that if overall class size remains roughly the same, given the size of the applicant pool and the pressure on admission slots, Brown can and should reduce its number of athletic recruitment slots. The primary reason for reducing slots is not to correct a misalignment with peers but, rather, to appropriately rebalance academic goals and athletic interests in the Brown context.

Beginning in 2012-2013, the total number of admission slots devoted to athletes should begin to be reduced from 225 to 205, a reduction of 9%. It is essential that whatever plan is devised to achieve this reduction be seen as judicious and that it take into account the needed balance between men and women's sports. The time period for accomplishing this reduction should be no longer than three years. The Athletic Director should submit a plan for accomplishing this reduction to the Vice President for Campus Life and Student Services.

## THE ACADEMIC INDEX AND THE REPRESENTATIVENESS OF ATHLETES

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The Ivy League has a formula for assuring that athletes are generally representative academically of the student body. The formula is based on SATs (or ACTs) and GPA. 240 is the maximum Academic Index (AI) and the League has set a floor of 176 below which an athlete should normally not be admitted. The League requires that the AI of each university's matriculating athletic cohort average no less than one standard deviation below the mean AI of its last 4 enrolling classes.

The Ivy League monitors closely the compliance of all its universities with the League's established admission standards for athletes. Brown is in compliance with those standards. However, over four recent admission classes, 2011-2014, Brown had 7 sports with average AI's under 200. Brown should improve its performance in this domain.

I recommend that, effective with the 2012-2013 incoming class, the Provost and Dean raise the AI target for the incoming athletic cohort above the league minimum to increase the representativeness of athletes at Brown. After a period of three years, this increased AI target should be examined to determine its impact and, if indicated, the University could consider adjusting it (consistent with Ivy policies) to a level that is more commensurate with the desired balance between the University's educational goals and its League competitiveness. These measures make clear Brown's commitment to league principles of "representativeness."

The increased competitiveness of the application pool leads to more general concerns that Brown should consider its overall admission policies and practices to assure academic "representativeness" across the entire spectrum of students admitted to Brown. No groups should be stigmatized by their over-representation in the bottom range of the AI's of a matriculating class. This is also true for athletes and their number and percentage within this group should be monitored annually to make certain that they are not over-represented in this lower range and that their AI's are in line with those of our Ivy colleagues.

The Dean of Admission, in consultation with the Provost and Dean of the College, is authorized to take the steps necessary to ensure that all students with special talents who are admitted to Brown, including athletes, meet the "representativeness" standard.

## SIZE, SCOPE AND BUDGETING OF ATHLETICS AT BROWN

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I said at the outset that the first principle of Ivy athletics is that it must follow the educational purposes of the institution and be managed under the oversight of academic officers and in the context of the University's academic goals. Brown is a university with a certain level of assets and a growing ambition in the academic and research arenas. The budget and scope of the Athletics Department and its programs must ultimately be set in view of Brown's overall capacity as well as in relation to its primary academic

needs and ambitions. The reputation of the University relies on the academic mission remaining paramount and, this being so, total resources should continue to be deployed in a manner consistent with this reality. Given the University's constrained resources and its many academic needs, far-sighted groups have rightly suggested that Athletics at Brown might not be sized appropriately. Hence, the Athletics Review Committee recommended that certain sports be eliminated: fencing, skiing and wrestling.

The opposition to cutting sports has been revealed to arise for a number of different reasons. Many have expressed the view that the suddenness of the recommendations, given the consequences for the affected students' college experience, is unfair. They argue that students should have had more time to assess their options and take needed action to address the possible loss of their team sport. Others found the financial argument for elimination of the three sports wanting because of what they considered to be the relatively modest savings from the elimination of the three sports. Athletes and others who support wrestling, fencing and skiing also insist that the Review Committee's perspectives on their team's coaching and facilities needs, practice and travel demands, and other issues were insufficiently studied and, therefore, the recommendations were ill considered and premature.

There is little doubt that calling for the elimination of a team sport will inevitably generate considerable dissatisfaction both within the teams singled out and across the community. After all, athletes often choose universities based on the fact that, in addition to addressing their academic needs, the university offers the athletic team sport that they deem important to their college experience. Taking that sport away drastically alters the college experience they felt they were promised. Yet, the Athletics Department at Brown should not and cannot be immune from the fiscal realities that every other program faces. In the setting of institutional priorities, university leadership must be able to redesign and realign programs as needed. Needless to say, such changes should not be undertaken in a vacuum nor in ways that prevent stakeholders from offering input. But, in the end, Athletics and all those who support athletics should acknowledge that, especially in the Ivy context, athletics needs are never elevated above academic programs and given protection that no other programs enjoy. To offer such treatment to athletics would be in clear violation of Ivy principles.

Admitting that our success to date in being clear about university constraints, concerns and priorities may have faltered, the question today is whether a better on-going process of review and long term planning can be instituted that not only makes clear the standards and expectations for sports in the context of university planning but also provides ample opportunity for debate and input before significant changes are instituted. The current process has certainly attempted this approach but there has been admittedly too little time and inadequate institution-wide focus to resolve all of the problems identified.

It is evident that Athletics must be placed on firmer financial footing. The Director of Athletics and his administrative team have done a commendable job of identifying the gap in funding – endowed and annual funds – on a team by team basis. In response to a request to develop a plan for putting all team sports on a better financial footing, he has proposed a five year period of time to allow teams to raise a total of \$42 million in additional endowment funds. This is an ambitious target, although even this amount falls short of what is needed to generate annual revenue that not only covers team costs but also department operating costs. Nevertheless, to set a specific expectation on a team by team basis, to communicate that expectation clearly, and to monitor and support efforts to accomplish these goals would constitute an important first step in gaining the confidence of teams and their supporters that the rules are clear and fairly applied.

All sports should be given goals and milestones for meeting the funding obligations set by Athletics and the University. The Athletics Department should submit sport-by-sport goals, plans, and strategies for each team's fundraising. This table of needs should serve as a guide to University officers, University Advancement, and volunteer fundraisers of how best to meet the initial funding needs of team sports at Brown. Periodic assessment of and communication about the progress of the University in reaching the targeted amounts will be essential to advancing the fundraising plan. This, in conjunction with a specific plan for enhanced university support through the operating budget, will enable the Athletics Department to make decisions and set internal priorities on a sensible basis.

Members of the fencing, wrestling and skiing teams have participated in this process in ways that suggest that they and their communities of supporters possess the willingness and the means to address many of the concerns raised by the Athletics Review Committee. Setting an example for other team sports, they and their supporters have come forward with assertions that they have raised significant funds to endow their sports. They have also suggested a willingness to adapt to new standards in regard to the number of recruitment slots. In the case of skiing, team leaders have identified a nearby site that eliminates the need to travel long distances twice a week to practice. All of this is done in the interest of retaining sports participation that is, for them, a defining aspect of their Brown experience.

The three teams recommended for elimination – wrestling, fencing and skiing – should be given the chance to demonstrate that their supporters are able to endow their sport at the level deemed necessary by the University. These sports should demonstrate over the course of the year that they have assembled gifts and pledges that, when combined with existing team-designated support, constitute an income stream sufficient to generate no less than 100% of the current annual budget for that sport.

In addition, the skiing team's proposed new practice and competition plan should be examined by the Dean of the College and the Vice President for Campus Life and Student Services to determine if it meets standards for an appropriate balance between academic and extra-curricular activity.

Over the next five years, assuming that annual funding continues at the current level, as Athletics builds the appropriate endowment base to support the current team sports, the University should agree not to cut the Athletics budget. Until such time as that budget reaches the overall agreed-upon funding target, all funds freed up by new endowment should be either reallocated within the Athletics budget or used to support incremental staffing needed to support the full Athletics program. In this way, donors will be better incentivized to make gifts to support athletics.

### **ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE: COACHES SALARIES, FACILITIES NEEDS, AND FINANCIAL AID MATCHING**

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The comprehensive plan submitted by the Athletics Review Committee is an important and far-reaching one. It does not solve all the budgetary issues of Athletics but it goes a long way toward establishing a path to improve significantly the quality of our athletic program. Important among the recommendations is the recognition that our excellent and dedicated coaching staff have been laboring under difficult conditions: inadequate salaries in some sports, less staff support and fewer team resources than peers, and challenging recruitment of athletes in a league where competitors are better funded. Addressing these funding inadequacies is important but just as important is the recognition the coaches deserve for their efforts in mentoring our athlete-scholars and in helping to build community cohesion at Brown. We are grateful for their extraordinary dedication to our students and the University and are determined to address these issues.

In that spirit, I will comment upon certain of other recommendations made by the Athletics Review Committee. The Committee recommended

1. That the non-competitiveness of coaching and other salaries in the Department be addressed. This is a responsibility that the University must bear. Effective in the next fiscal year, the University should begin addressing the absolute level of coaches' salaries, the appropriate duty time for part-time coaches, and disparities in compensation between men and women in the Department. The Director of Athletics, the Vice President for Campus Life and Student Services and the Vice President for Finance and Administration have identified the cost of increasing coaches' duty time where needed, bringing coaches' salaries to the appropriate range of peer institutions, and addressing important internal equity issues. The Provost should work with the University Resources Committee to incorporate this planning into the FY 13 budget that it recommends to the President.
2. That the field hockey field, related field issues, and new locker room needs should be addressed. I will support an effort to raise \$10 million for these improvements.
3. That the Athletics Department adopt policies that minimize the number and impact of schedule conflicts on student performance and choice. I concur.
4. That an "extra-curricular block" be created in the late afternoon to reduce the conflict between practice times and special academic opportunities. This is a matter for the Dean of the College, Provost and faculty to consider.
5. That the level of resources for matching competitive financial aid offers from other Ivy institutions be increased. I agree provided that this program is carried out as called for in Ivy rules and monitored to ensure that it does not favor athletes over other students.

The relative standing of Brown's Athletics budget within the League is a cause for concern. Brown's budget for each sport offered (except soccer) is below the Ivy average for those sports. Salaries for coaches trail those of virtually all other Ivies. The seriousness of this situation cannot be denied. Nevertheless, the implementation suggested here with regard to resources must be reviewed in the context of the entire budget. The Provost, Vice President for Finance and Administration, and Vice President for Advancement should confirm the feasibility of any schedule of increases to the Athletics budget in light of total university demands. The ambitious goals and strict timeline in the report may not be possible in the current economic environment.

Consistent with the first principles of Ivy athletics, the Provost should incorporate these priorities into his overall recommendations to the President and determine the best way to accommodate these goals in the context of other University priorities. However, the improvement of athletics staff compensation and the financial aid program in line with League policy must find their way onto the University's list of overall priorities in the very nearest term.

## FOLLOW-UP PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of this plan will require the attention of the President and Provost. However, I have asked the Vice President for Campus Life and Student Services to undertake primary responsibility with the Director of Athletics for the follow-up planning and implementation of these recommendations. The Vice President will ensure that the relevant planning, on-going monitoring and reviews, and reports to



the Dean, Provost and President meet specified timetables and that all plans are developed and reviewed in ways that are consistent both with Ivy League rules and principles and with the intent of these recommendations: to strengthen Athletics at Brown and provide our students with the kind of experience they deserve.

## CONCLUSION

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This has not been an easy process, but it has been in the end an immensely helpful one. I especially thank the Athletics Review Committee for encouraging a breadth of participation throughout that has been exceptional and valuable. A hallmark of the Brown community, disagreement often leads to clarity and debate to better solutions. In reflecting on the mistakes we have made in reviewing these questions, I can see nevertheless that a number of important matters have come to light that we might not otherwise have discovered.

First, too few on our campus understand the meaning of our participation in the Ivy League. While it is a decided benefit to be called an Ivy League university, our membership carries with it many costs and obligations. The first obligation is that Athletics must be governed by academic officers. The clear intent of this rule is that athletics will never become an end in itself but will always be shaped in the context of our educational mission. Perhaps few recognize how greatly this approach differs from the governance of athletics on most U.S. campuses. Going forward, it is important for Brown to make this governance approach as robust and meaningful as it was originally intended when the League was created.

Secondly, the concern expressed about the way in which the review was carried out provides us with an opportunity to improve the transparency of our decision making process. There will undeniably be changes in the University's offerings (both academic and non-academic) in the future. Creating a process in which clear expectations are set, problems are revealed in a timely way, and stakeholders are given adequate time to address questions and shortfalls is essential to maintaining a governance environment that secures and holds the trust of participants.

Thanks to the work of the Corporation in requesting a review, the Review Committee in stating the seriousness of the dilemma that Athletics faces as a consequence of a budget that is inadequate to support the number of team sports it now offers, and the community of athletes and their many supporters who patiently (and sometimes vociferously) presented a case for continuation, we have learned a good deal about how to support athletics at Brown. We should all be grateful that we can now set a course for change that will result in a better experience for student athletes at Brown.

Ruth J. Simmons

October 14, 2011