April 29, 2011

Dear Brown Community Members,

As you may be aware, the Athletics Review Committee released a preliminary report for campus discussion and feedback on April 21. This report, an effort to resolve longstanding questions about the appropriate scope and budget for Brown’s varsity athletics program, is a response to a request from the Corporation that we submit a plan for addressing these questions at their May 2011 meeting.

In the week that the preliminary report has been available, campus discussion and debate about this subject has naturally generated a variety of concerns from students, parents, alumni, staff and faculty. Committee members have listened attentively to those concerns. However, one observation that has been made repeatedly is that the time-frame for consideration and implementation of the discontinuation of specific sports is too brief. This is especially troubling for some because of where we are in the semester, when students are focused on final projects and exams. Heeding this concern, the committee has now recommended to me that further deliberations and decisions on any recommendations concerning the discontinuation of team sports be placed on hold until the beginning of the fall semester.

I have decided therefore to report to the Corporation that we will not make a recommendation with respect to the future status of wrestling, skiing and fencing at the May meeting and that those team sports will be allowed to continue through the next academic year. I will return to this matter in the fall, giving ample time for further discussion prior to submitting a recommendation at the October meeting of the Corporation.

However, I will recommend to the Corporation at the May 2011 meeting that we move ahead to implement certain other of the committee’s recommendations. In particular, effective Fall 2011, I will recommend that we begin to

- reduce the number of admission slots for recruited athletes in line with the report’s rationale and terms for doing so
- develop a plan to make the necessary salary adjustments for staff and coaches as called for in the report;
- raise funds to support improvements in financial aid as allowed under Ivy rules, which provide that we may only improve financial aid to athletes if we are similarly improving aid for non-athletes; and
- raise funds for the most urgent additional needs identified by the report.

I acknowledge that this discussion has been very difficult for all concerned: the students who stand to be significantly affected by the discontinuation of their teams, the supporters of those teams, the committee, and the campus more generally. While delaying the decision on the outcome for these teams is not ideal, I am persuaded that the committee’s recommendation to
allow students to complete the semester’s work without the burden or stress of addressing this issue is sound and compassionate. Students will be able to return to Brown in September with the assurance of a full year of participation in their sport as well as have the opportunity to offer additional input about the value and status of their sport before a decision is made. Let me add also that we do not and will not plan to discontinue any additional varsity sports as part of this process.

I want to thank the wrestling, skiing and fencing students and their many supporters for their efforts to collect information and to offer testimony to the committee. Not surprisingly, our students have conducted themselves with great poise and intelligence. I am especially grateful to the committee for the work they have completed to date on this very important topic. Their efforts to address the needs of the Athletics program as called for by the Corporation Principles of February 2011 as well as their openness to debate have been laudable. The committee’s memorandum to me pertaining to the suspension of discussion may be found on its webpage, where the April 21 report already resides.

Sincerely,

Ruth J. Simmons