

The Faculty Council of Rice University
520 Fondren Library, MS-35
6100 Main Street
Houston, TX 77251-1892

May 2, 2004

Rice Faculty:

Re: Poll on Athletics at Rice

Dear Faculty:

Pursuant to its goal of maintaining an open informed discussion of athletics at Rice the Faculty Council has completed a faculty poll on that subject. Attached you will find our discussion of the poll results, a one page graphical format for selected questions, and the return summaries for all the questions.

Sincerely, Ed Akin,
Speaker of Faculty Council

JEA

Faculty Council of Rice University
Evaluation of the Faculty Poll on Athletics

April 29, 2004

In April 2004 Faculty Council conducted a poll of the Rice faculty designed to assess its member's views with regard to the role of athletics in the life of the university. The following narrative summarizes and evaluates the results of that poll. The poll itself, with response data shown for each question, appears at the end of this document.

Procedure: Faculty Council took care to construct a poll that all responsible parties to the debate could accept as a reliable representation of faculty opinion. Each of the six questions went through multiple drafts to minimize ambiguity, eliminate biased wording, and arrive at language that would give all parties a fair opportunity to express their view. Particular care was taken to phrase questions in such a way that no one would feel intimidated by majoritarian pressures to give a "correct" answer.

Once the wording of the questions was settled, the poll was distributed to all voting faculty. The procedure duplicated that routinely employed to elect new members of Faculty Council and University Council. The poll was put in campus mail by Faculty Council's executive assistant, just as if it were an election ballot. The poll arrived in faculty mailboxes over a week before the deadline for its return (14 April). In each mailing was a return envelope preaddressed to the Office of Faculty Council and affixed with a label showing the name of the faculty member receiving the poll. The faculty member was instructed to sign his/her name, seal the completed poll in the enclosed envelope, and return it to the Office of Faculty Council. The polls were then shipped by Federal Express to an outside contractor who performed the basic analysis. At many stages of the process, Faculty Council was assisted by advice from one of its members, Professor Michael Emerson of the Sociology Department, whose distinguished scholarship is based on intensive polling.

The category of "voting faculty" at Rice embraces 547 people, of whom all but 56 are tenured or tenure-track. Of the 229 faculty members who returned this year's poll, 94 percent were tenured or tenure-track. One hundred and thirty-three respondents (58 percent) reported that they had read Faculty Council's "Report on Athletics at Rice," originally published in spring 2003. The overall rate of return of the poll was 42 percent, more than participated in the most recent Faculty Council election (35 percent). This year's rate of return was not as strong as the remarkably high 61 percent return achieved in 1992, when the faculty last polled itself on athletic issues.¹ The lowest rates of return this year (just as in 1992) were from the professional schools: Architecture, 13 percent; Shepherd School 24 percent; and Jones School, 30 percent. The rate of return was highest in the Social Sciences (55 percent), followed by the Humanities (50 percent), Natural Sciences (46 percent) and Engineering (34 percent). The opinions of faculty members were substantially similar across all four divisions and the three professional schools.²

¹ The 1992 poll is part of the Preliminary Statement and Final Report of the Faculty Council Committee on Athletics, 1992, which is included as Appendix E of Faculty Council's most recent report, Athletics at Rice: A Report to Faculty Council, March 2003.

² If the response rate were producing biased average responses, we would expect different average response across the schools, as their response rates differed. When we checked for associations between the poll questions by school, however, we did not find any. The average responses across the schools for each of the six poll questions were statistically identical. This was true both including and excluding the School of Architecture, which registered the lowest response rate.

To track broad changes, if any, in faculty opinion, this year's poll posed questions similar to, or sometimes even identical with, those asked in the Faculty Council poll of 1992. As will be seen, the pattern of response to this year's poll turns out to be reassuringly similar to that elicited by the previous poll, with its exceptionally high return rate. Only one of the demographic questions in the survey was associated with the main poll questions: *the number of athletic events attended in the past year*. For summary purposes, we compared high attendees (10 or more athletic events in the past year) to non-attendees (no athletic events in the past year). Compared to non-attendees, higher attendees were more supportive of playing in Division I-A (63% vs. 11%), more likely to view the current balance between athletics and academics as acceptable (63% vs. 15%), more likely to view the oversight committees' current role as acceptable (44% vs. 6%), more likely to think that the clustering of athletes in certain courses and majors is a matter of individual preference alone (75% vs. 9%), and more likely to say that moving to non-NCAA competition is unacceptable (80% vs. 18%). Most faculty members, however, are not high attendees: nearly 50% reported not attending a single event in the past year, and 75% have been to two or fewer athletic events in the last year. Only seven percent of the faculty who completed the survey attended 10 or more Rice athletic events in the past year.

Discussion of Responses: The first two questions invite the person filling out the poll to make broad assessments -- first as to the *importance* of big time athletics to Rice, and then concerning the balance of athletic and academic *priorities* on this campus. Questions 1 and 2 in this year's poll closely track questions asked in the poll of 1992, when Rice was still a member of the Southwest Conference. Only 15 percent of the 1992 respondents considered "intercollegiate athletics at the level of the Southwest Conference . . . an important activity that is worthy of strong university support." In the 2004 poll, considerably more -- nearly a quarter of this year's respondents -- declare themselves in favor of "strong university support" for continuation of competition at the I-A level.

On both occasions, however, substantial faculty majorities declared big-time athletic competition either an "ancillary activity," or "of no importance whatsoever" -- 83 percent did so in 1992 and 74 percent this year. By the same token, three quarters of the faculty said in 1992 that "academic standards for Rice athletes should be improved, even if this means moving to a less competitive level of athletics." The proportion of faculty echoing that sentiment this year was only slightly lower at 69 percent. Two members of the faculty went on record this year as favoring an improvement of athletic competitiveness, even if that meant a lowering of academic standards. No one expressed that opinion in 1992.

Questions 3, 4, and 5 all concern reform strategies -- the role of the three-person faculty committee overseeing athletic admissions; the question of possible *de facto* shelters; and the SAT floor beneath which admission of an athlete should normally not be permitted.

Responses to question 3 show that 14 percent of the faculty think the oversight committee's function is acceptable in its present form. Another 5 percent think the committee is already too strong. In contrast, 73 percent think the committee is "unacceptably weak." A similarly lopsided split over athletic and academic priorities emerges in question 4 in regard to the tendency of athletes to cluster in a small number of courses and majors. Two out of ten Rice faculty regard the clustering of athletes as an unproblematical reflection of athletes' preferences and interests; in contrast, seven of every ten faculty think clustering reflects not only interest and preference but also constricted study time, weaker academic preparation, and/or disinclination to take full

advantage of Rice's demanding curriculum. Responses to question 5 show that 14 percent of the faculty are opposed to any floor defined by SAT scores, while 69 percent favor a floor set at 1000 or higher. A SAT score of 1000 was the floor chosen most often this year, just as it was in 1992. In this year's poll 30 percent of respondents called for a floor of 1100 or higher.

The sixth and last question invited the faculty to express preferences between various levels and types of athletic competition. What level of competition would be most suitable for Rice, given its small size, high selectivity, and demanding curriculum?³

Poll respondents had five options among which to choose, ranging from continuation in Division I-A (Conference USA with athletic scholarships), to termination of NCAA-sponsored competition and expansion of club sports in its place (no scholarships). Respondents were asked to do two things: Put the various options in rank order of preference in one column, and then, in an adjacent column, indicate which, if any, they regarded as "unacceptable."

The two options defining the polar extremes – continuation in Conference USA and expansion of club sports – aroused considerable resistance in both columns. Ninety eight faculty respondents (43%) found Conference USA "unacceptable;" seventy-one (31%) said the same about the club sports option. These two options were also the two *least* likely to be ranked high in preference (23% and 25% respectively).

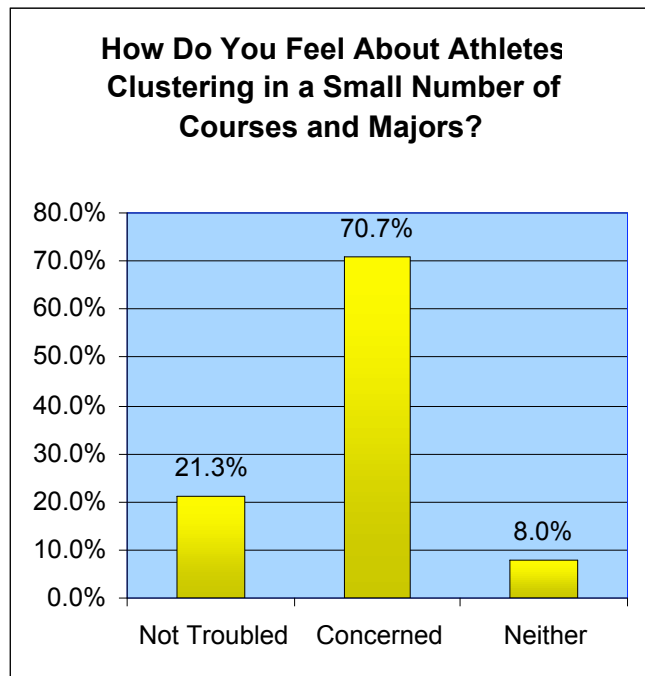
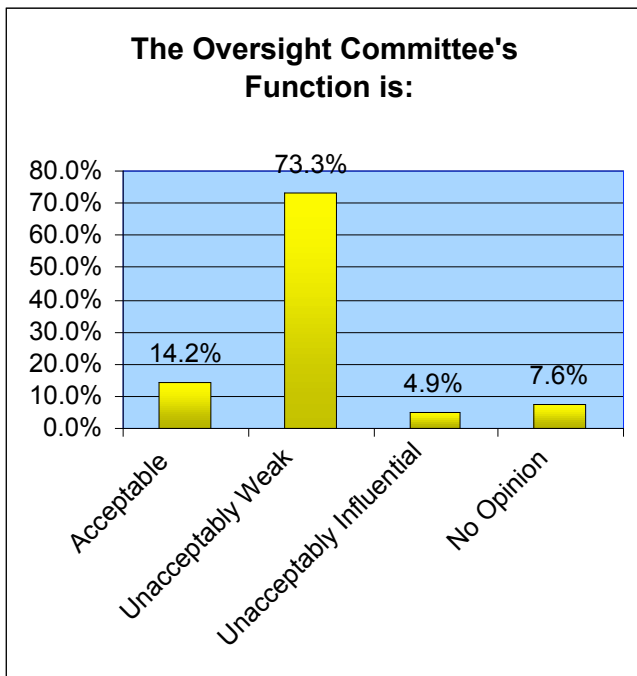
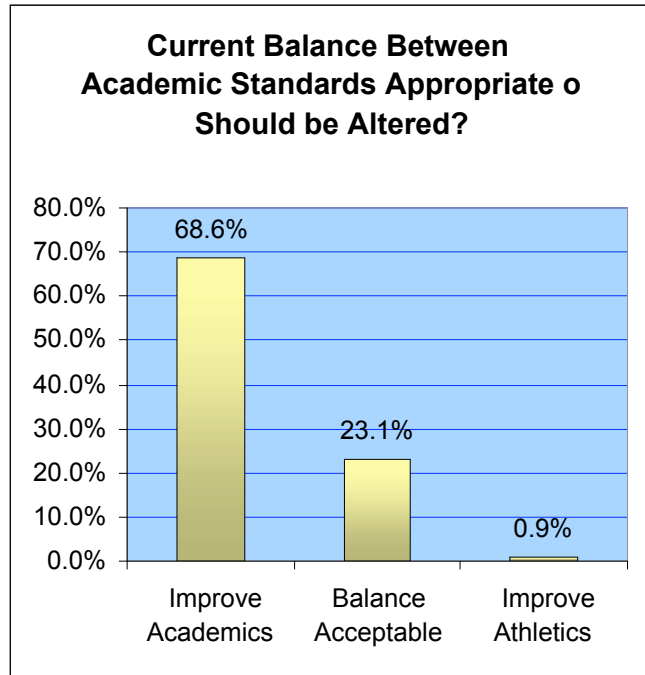
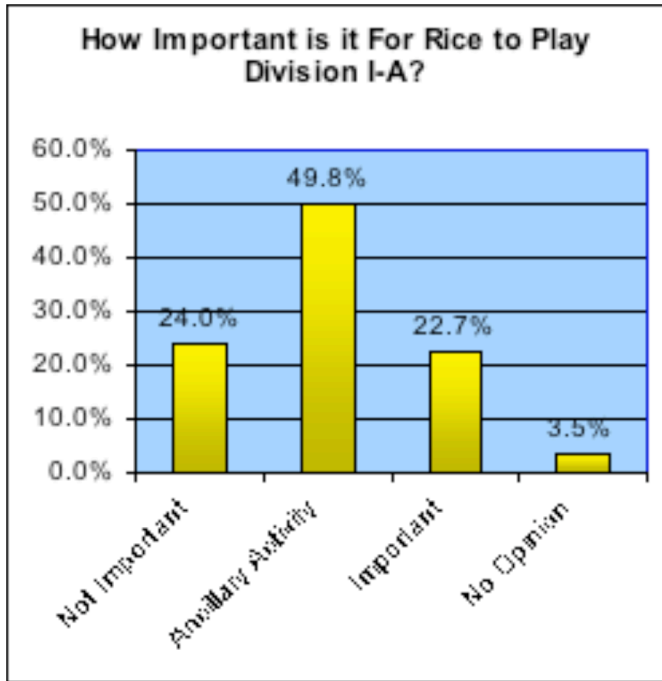
The option of continuing in Division I-A, but dropping football, seems to have elicited neither strong support nor strong opposition. It got a middling level of support in the preference column and a middling level of hostility in the "unacceptable" column.

Among the five options in this year's poll, there are two that respondents clearly favored above all others. One is the move to Division III, which bans athletic scholarships altogether. The other favored option is creation of a new Division I-AA or I-AAA conference, whose member schools could presumably agree amongst themselves to ban athletic scholarships, even though the NCAA normally permits them. A glance at the 2004 poll data for question 6 will show that the two non-scholarship options were *most* likely to be ranked high in preference and *least* likely to be found "unacceptable"

In this respect the 1992 poll and the 2004 poll produced the same result. In 1992 faculty respondents chose among seven options, three of which entailed a ban on athletic scholarships. Then as now, the non-scholarship options were the ones *most frequently* rated high in preference and the ones *least likely* to be labeled "unacceptable." On this pivotal issue, little has changed since 1992.

³ Because of a delay in the expected publication date of the McKinsey report, Faculty Council had to construct its poll before it was informed of the exact options that the McKinsey report would examine and set before the trustees. We trust that suitable extrapolations can and will be made from the unavoidably generic options listed in question 6.

Graphs of Poll Questions 1-4



RESULTS OF A FACULTY COUNCIL POLL ON THE FUTURE OF THE RICE ATHLETIC PROGRAM Spring 2004

This is a poll of faculty opinion regarding athletics at Rice. As background material, you may want to consult the Faculty Council's 2003 report, copies of which were first made available at the Fondren reserve desk in August 2003 and later distributed to each departmental office. A link to the most up-to-date version of the report appears on the Faculty Council webpage < <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~faccoun/>>

Please complete and return this survey to the President's Office in the enclosed envelope **NO LATER THAN Wednesday, 14 April**. Your input is very important and the closer we get to 100% return, the more the faculty's voice will count. This survey is confidential. Your name will not be associated with the answers you give, so please tell us exactly what you think.

- (1)** This question is designed to see **how important it is to you that Rice continue to participate in intercollegiate athletics at the level of NCAA Division I-A**. Please check the response that best reflects your opinion.

The playing of intercollegiate sports at the level of Division I-A is:

- 24% (55) of no importance whatever to Rice University
50% (114) at most, an ancillary activity of the university
23% (52) an important activity that is worthy of strong university support
4% (8) a matter about which I have little firm opinion.

- (2)** This question is designed to see **whether you feel that the current balance between academic standards and athletic competitiveness is appropriate or should be altered**. Please check the response that best reflects your opinion.

- 69% (157) Academic standards for Rice athletes should be improved, even if this means moving to a less competitive level of athletic competition.
23% (53) Rice's present balance between academic standards and athletic competitiveness is acceptable and can be retained without serious negative consequences.
1% (2) Rice's athletic competitiveness in Division I-A should be improved, even if this means a lowering of academic standards.
5% (11) None of the above (Please explain.) _____

3% (6) I have no opinion.

- (3)** This question is designed to see **whether you approve of the current practice in which the faculty's only influence over the admission of athletes is exercised by a three person faculty oversight committee which reads the abbreviated application submitted by all prospective scholarship athletes and advises the associate director of admissions as to their academic suitability. The associate director is authorized to overrule the committee's advice even when the vote is 3 to 0 against admission**. (In addition, the associate director's final decisions are subject to reversal by the president on appeal by the athletic director or his designee.)

I regard the oversight committee's function as:

- 14% (32) acceptable in its present form.
73% (165) unacceptably weak in its present form.
5% (11) unacceptably influential in its present form.
8% (17) I have no opinion.

- (4)** This question is designed to see **how you feel about athletes clustering in a small number of courses and majors.**

I regard the clustering of athletes

21% (48) As a reflection of their individual preferences and interests, which does not trouble me as a member of the faculty.

71% (159) As a reflection partly of athletes' interests but also possibly one or more of the following: severely constricted study time, weaker academic preparation at matriculation, and/or disinclination to take full advantage of Rice's demanding curriculum. These are matters that the faculty, as guardian of academic integrity, should be concerned about.

8% (18) None of the above (Please explain.) _____

- (5)** This question is designed to **let you specify a "floor" for SAT scores (combined math and verbal) below which athletic admissions ordinarily should not go. Since the SAT is but one fallible measure of merit, we take it for granted that any floor must be flexibly interpreted and remain open to exceptions.** You may find the following items of information useful in making your choice:

Of **all Rice freshmen** admitted in 2003, the middle half scored between 1330 and 1490. (These figures represent the 25th and 75th percentile, respectively.)

Of **all scholarship athletes** admitted to Rice in 2003, the middle half scored between 1010 and 1200.

The **bottom quartile of scholarship athletes** admitted to Rice in 2003 ranged from a low of 870 to a high of 1010, with a median of 960.

The **bottom quartile of students other than scholarship athletes** who were admitted to Rice in 2003 ranged from a low of 1060 to a high of 1360, with a mean of 1290.

The NCAA does not specify a floor defined in terms of SAT alone, but instead uses a sliding scale that varies with SAT and high school GPA. Although unlikely, in principle a student with a 4.0 GPA could be admitted with SATs as low as 400. Some exceptions are permitted.

Granting that a degree of discretionary leeway should be built into any admissions procedure and that other predictors of academic promise should outweigh SATs in particular cases, where would you set the floor beneath which the Rice athletic admissions process ordinarily should not go?

12% (27) <u>1200</u>	<u>700</u>
18% (40) <u>1100</u>	<u>(1) 600</u>
39% (88) <u>1000</u>	<u>500</u>
8% (17) <u>900</u>	<u>14% (31)</u> No SAT floor should be established.
2% (3) <u>800</u>	<u>8% (18)</u> No opinion

- (6)** Below we list five options that Rice could pursue with regard to intercollegiate athletics. Please indicate your preferences by putting them in rank order ("1" by your most favored choice, "2" by your second most favored choice, etc.) **It is very important that you rank all of the alternatives. After ranking the alternatives, place an "X" beside any option that you consider unacceptable.**

Not acceptable? Mark "X"	Rank in order of preference. (Sum of first and second choices)	Alternatives (If your favorite option does not appear here, tell us about it at the end of the poll.)
43% (98)	23% (52)	Continue full NCAA Division I-A competition (implying athletic scholarships). This is the level at which Rice now competes in WAC and will compete in Conference USA next year.
18% (40)	38% (87)	Continue Division I-A competition (implying athletic scholarships) in all sports except football, in which Rice would cease competing. (NCAA calls this Division I-AAA)
10% (23)	45% (103)	Organize a new regional "Ivy League-style" conference (Division I-AA or I-AAA) without athletic scholarships. The ban on scholarships would be an agreement among conference schools, not anything mandated by NCAA rules, which normally require scholarships in Division I.
11% (24)	56% (129)	Move to NCAA Division III, which prohibits athletic scholarships. One Division III possibility is the University Athletic Association which includes Brandeis, Carnegie Mellon, Case Western Reserve, University of Chicago, Emory, NYU, Rochester, and Washington University St. Louis.
31% (71)	25% (58)	Terminate NCAA-sponsored competition and expand the club sports program. Clubs would schedule their own contests, at home or away, as they saw fit. Sports to be included would depend on student preference and the administration's willingness to provide funding for equipment, travel, etc.

Note: For column 1, each percentage is calculated as the number of respondents who checked the option as unacceptable divided by the total number of respondents who answered the question (and multiplied by 100).

For column 2, each percentage is calculated as the number of respondents who listed the option as their first or second choice, divided by the total number of respondents who answered the question (and multiplied by 100).

The following questions are asked for analytical purposes. Your answers will help Faculty Council establish whether or not the sample of respondents is representative of the faculty as a whole. Please circle the most appropriate response to each question.

My age is:	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79
	0% (1)	25% (56)	21% (48)	30% (69)	17% (39)	5% (11)

Years at Rice:	1-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-29	30 or more
	21% (49)	16% (36)	14% (32)	10% (22)	21% (47)	16% (36)

Number of Rice intercollegiate athletic events I have attended in past 12 months:				
None	1-2	3-5	6-10	More than ten
46% (106)	26% (60)	12% (28)	6% (14)	7% (16)

A. I am a member of

<u>2</u> School of Architecture	13% return
<u>12</u> Jones Graduate School of Management	30% return
<u>9</u> Shepherd School of Music	24% return
<u>36</u> Brown School of Engineering	34% return
<u>68</u> School of Humanities	50% return
<u>61</u> Weiss School of Natural Sciences	46% return
<u>31</u> School of Social Sciences	55% return

B. 11% (26) I am a graduate of Rice. (check if applicable)

C. 58% (133) I have read the Faculty Council's spring 2003 "Report on Athletics at Rice." (check if applicable)

Use the space that follows for any comments you wish to make. At least one member of Faculty Council will read each response.