



Department of Economics

Dear Colleagues:

I am writing to share information about the Faculty Council Report and Poll. In this document I point out a number of issues I believe may potentially mislead you in your deliberations. I have made the same case in faculty meetings and in conversations with a number of individuals. There are aspects of both the report and the poll that are instructive and informative. I focus here on the many aspects of both that are not. I want you to have this perspective from a faculty member who wants to be informed with factual data, is open-minded about trade-offs involved in academic priorities, and who realizes that expenditures for specific programs are relatively easy to identify and benefits are not. I believe that this perspective reflects the views of the majority of faculty at Rice.

I trust that the following points are informative. I would be happy to discuss any of them with you.

Sincerely,

Robin C. Sickles  
Professor of Economics  
Professor of Statistics  
Director of the Graduate Program in Economics and  
Chair of the Rice University Athletics Committee

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This is a partial list of distorted and/or incorrect statements made by the Faculty Council *ad hoc* Subcommittee on Athletics in their recent poll to the faculty regarding attitudes towards athletics and in the Faculty Council Report. I have also provided documentation from the Rice University Athletics Committee (RUAC) recently completed student/athletes' exit interviews.

1. The return address for the poll is not the President's Office as stated in the poll itself but rather the Faculty Council. The faculty member who fills out the document is identified. Thus there is no anonymity even though the poll states that it is confidential. This provides the minority of faculty council members who want to change university athletic priorities with a list of names of faculty who are in favor of the status quo and those who are opposed. Given the history of this group within Faculty Council who oppose the status quo, there is a possibility that this confidential information will not be held in confidence.
2. The instructions to the person responding to the poll advise that as background material one should consult the Faculty Council subcommittee's biased report (verified as biased by a committee member's statement 'We do not pretend to be neutral.').
3. The survey was distributed prior to discussion or approval by the faculty regarding its appropriateness. In fact, during the faculty meeting when the survey was presented, numerous faculty members as well as the Vice President for Enrollment pointed out fatal flaws in the survey
4. As for elaboration on the different concerns about the poll let me start with the timing of the poll. It was distributed to faculty at the same time the ad hoc committee of Faculty Council released their report and before the McKinsey Report was released. The McKinsey Report was commissioned in order to provide information on a wide range of issues involving intercollegiate athletics across the country and at Rice. That report has been released to the Board. The report by the ad hoc committee of the Faculty Council cannot be relied on to provide unbiased and accurate information necessary to make informed judgments about student/athletic priorities at Rice. As for why the poll is a biased one that cannot register accurate faculty views let me point to the first and last question. The first question has four possible answers. One is neutral about athletics at Rice while the other three are negative (I am assuming here that indifference is not a positive reaction). Random answers will provide a negative assessment of athletics. The last question asks about various options to change Rice's historic priorities in intercollegiate athletic competition. Option # 3, for example, suggests that a new regional conference of I-AA or I-AAA be pursued and that it could be done by agreement, ignoring NCAA rules.
5. The only conference that roughly corresponds to the athletic priorities suggested in the realistic options for changing Rice's historic NCAA Division I status in the poll is the Missouri Valley Conference. Presumably Rice could join with such peer universities as: Southern Illinois, SW Missouri State, Creighton, Drake, Northern Iowa, Evansville, Indiana State, Illinois State, Wichita State, and Bradley. Clearly these universities are not peers of Rice and no reasonable person would contemplate this suggested option. The notion that Rice could maintain Division I status in some sports while not having, for example, Division I status in football is misguided.

There are only 7 schools that enjoy this option and the NCAA has made it clear that there will be no others.

6. The subcommittee's report stated there was insufficient evidence to bring the report to the general faculty, but did so anyway. The report was made public, contrary to the subcommittee chair's recommendation (in the cover letter to the president) and the then-chair of Faculty Council's promise that the report would remain confidential.
7. The report concludes "athletes are found in violation of the Honor code several times more often than non-athletes." The number of violations of the Honor Code over the last thirteen years has averaged 8. That represents less than one-half of one percent of the student body. There is no objective statistical conclusion that can be made with such small rates.
8. Economics and Kinesiology are pointed to as degree programs that may "serve as shelters for athletes." Average grades given in Economics and Kinesiology are in fact lower than those given in such majors as English and History, even though many more non-athletes than student/athletes populate Econ and Kines. (A table compiled from three-year data provided by Rice's Registrar illustrating this fact was distributed to the faculty in the September faculty meeting. Moreover, because of the distribution requirement (six courses each must be taken in natural sciences/engineering, humanities, and social sciences), there is little chance that any department could be regarded as a shelter. Clearly student/athletes are interested in sports and in business. They tend to be strong leaders and are very well prepared both academically and by personality to take on professional careers in the business world and to pursue sports oriented endeavors when they graduate, and graduate they do—at rates that have exceed the graduation rates of the general student body.

One clear reason that athletes tend to be interested in business and kines-related courses is that they're "normal"; they are not admitted to match a major-related quota. Most high school graduates across the nation reflect an interest in business and/or health-related majors. It is Rice that requires that its "regular" admits in each entering class must conform to a quota in which 30% are science, 30% are engineering, and 30% are humanities/social science. Such a distribution is not at all in line with the interests of most college-bound students in America.)

9. The report compares nominal 1996 and 2001 expenditures in athletics without adjusting for changes in the cost of living and then concludes that these are "run-away" expenditures. Moreover, no adjustments were made for the expansion of women's sports required by the NCAA. The report did not speak to the share of expenditures in the Rice budget. The share has been flat for a number of years and has actually declined over Malcolm Gillis's tenure at Rice.
10. There is no comparison of spending with other units of Rice University. A rough estimate of increases in spending by other units of the University based on 4%/annum salary increases and increases in the number of tenured/tenure track positions from 1996 to 2001 gives a 20% minimum increase across departments. Examples of increases in particular departments are 40% for Chemistry and 80% for the Business School. These estimates do not include the costs of new facilities.
11. The report makes the statement that there has been "only modest progress in recent years in preventing the admission of numerous academically unprepared athletes (based on SAT test scores)". However, the retention/graduation rate for the group of student athletes with the lowest SAT test scores was 97%. SAT test scores are highly

- correlated with socioeconomic status and are poor predictors of educational success. There is no definition of the meaning of "academically unprepared." These are the same students who graduate at the highest level of any cohort in the university?
12. The report did not provide any discussion of the "opportunity costs" of changing the historic athletic priorities at Rice University. There is no evidence, based on the focus group meetings with McKinsey and Board members, that a sophisticated study of the many factors in such a calculation is being seriously attempted.
  13. The report tries to justify itself by speaking to the interests of student/athletes whose positive experiences at Rice are compromised by their poor preparation and the demands on their time due to their athletic commitments. RUAC conducts exit interviews of student/athletics each year as part of its function to oversee athletics policies at Rice and to ensure compliance with NCAA rules and guidelines. On the following pages is the report to RUAC by the subcommittee on exit interviews.

It is clear from these recently compiled exit interviews that Rice student/athletes wish to compete at the highest level in whatever they do. These are remarkable young men and women. Rice may be able to attract student/athletes who wish to compete at the highest level in academics and at the lowest level in athletics. Do we want these students at Rice? Do we want **any** students who don't aspire to excellence at the highest level in competitions with peers in all their pursuits?

Report to the Rice University Athletic Committee  
From  
Exit Interviews Sub-committee

April 20, 2004

Faculty Sub-committee Members:

Bruce Etnyre, Kinesiology, Sub-committee Chair  
James Castañeda, Spanish  
Dennis Huston, English

The sub-committee conducted individual interviews with nine of 56 students (approximately 18%) identified by the Athletic Department as 2004 graduating seniors. All students volunteered to participate in a half-hour meeting with the faculty sub-committee in early April before their May graduation. Student-athletes were assured of anonymity in this report.

Six sports, including managers or trainers were represented by the nine students interviewed. The sports with no representatives had either no one volunteer for the interview or had no graduating seniors in the sport.

The general areas of interest from the student-athletes' perceptions were related to:

- 1) overall athletic and academic experiences
- 2) satisfaction with: athletic; academic; social; and academic advising experiences
- 3) relations with students outside athletics
- 4) college and/or off-campus living accommodations
- 5) limited course selection because of athletic participation
- 6) interactions with faculty related to athletics

1) The overall perceptions of athletic and academic experiences at Rice were very positive. Invariably students remarked they had received an outstanding education and their education was enhanced by the opportunity to participate in Division I athletics. It was frequently stated by the student-athletes that they had a strong desire not only to compete at the highest level athletically, but to compete at the highest level academically as well, which they felt would not have been possible at other universities. Some turned down opportunities at other universities to attend Rice so they could participate at the highest level both athletically and academically, rather than either one or the other. One student remarked it was "the best of both worlds." Several students made positive comments about the family type atmosphere at Rice deriving from their athletic and college system experiences at a small school. Others found the diversity of experiences available at Rice as the most positive characteristic. It was reported that travel to different places (even Boise) resulted in very valuable experiences.

2) Athletics: The majority of student-athletes expressed very good or excellent experiences in their athletic participation. Several of the students made a point of how being involved in athletics forced them to develop excellent skills in time-management. Everyone interviewed reported eagerness to attend Rice and participate in athletics if they had the opportunity to do it again. One student said the worst thing about the athletic experience was the training room facilities and staff. One of the managers/trainers stated there had been no hot water in their shower facility for two years, despite frequent requests to repair it. A frequent remark was that the coaches were very understanding of the academic pressures on the student-athlete. In several

sports coaches changed or adapted the practice schedules to allow students to attend classes (particularly afternoon classes). One of the students reported an unfavorable athletic experience, mainly because of a personality conflict between the athlete and coach. Another student expressed concern regarding extensive religious references by coaches. Academics: All student-athletes reported they received an excellent education and a valuable academic experience. It was recommended by two interviewees that student-athletes should be encouraged more to participate in the study-abroad program and wished they had been made more aware of the many other resources available to them. Several student-athletes desired a better method for obtaining class notes when they needed to miss class. Usually the only person they knew in a class to ask for notes was another student-athlete in the same sport who also missed the class. It was also mentioned that student-athletes sometimes didn't ask questions in class because of possible embarrassment that the same question had been asked during their absence. Social: Most all felt they had a limited social life because of the time constraints of athletic participation, but generally didn't mind this minor sacrifice. Some students actively sought out social experiences at the expense of sleep or studying, but some reported they didn't pursue social experiences when they might have, mostly as a personal choice, similar to non-student-athletes. Other students said their social life was enhanced by the college system experience. Academic Advising: Academic advising from divisional advisors, departments, faculty and Athletic Academic Advising was generally considered adequate. Some students felt they didn't need advising, some sought out advisors and most believed the Athletic Academic Advising was very good, but generally overloaded with the number of student-athletes needing advising.

3) Generally relations between non-athletes and athletes were perceived as equally negative and positive. Some student-athletes said they felt some non-athletes perceived them as not being serious students. One suggested this might have been a carryover stereotype developed during high school. Another student-athlete indicated a desire to have more non-athlete than athlete friends to enjoy more diverse experiences. Student-athletes felt they were much more integrated into the general student body than at any other university (citing athlete dorms and cafeterias, although athletic dorms are no longer officially allowed). A new program initiated this year incorporated a mandatory session during O-Week for all colleges regarding the life of the student-athlete. This was viewed as being very successful for informing non-athletes of the enormous pressures and time-constraints of student-athletes.

4) All of the student-athletes interviewed said they lived in the college, ranging from two to four years. Many student-athletes became very involved with their colleges after their 3 1/2 or four year athletic commitment. One was an O-Week coordinator. A common reason given for moving off-campus was the differences between the athletes' and non-athletes' schedules. Their experience was that many non-athletes had more time to do their work than they did, so often the non-athletes were too noisy when the athletes were trying to study or sleep. The conflict in schedules made it very difficult for athletes to feel adequately prepared for their academic and athletic participation. The only reasonable solution was to leave the college residency. Most regretted, to varying degrees, not being able to participate more in college life. Reasons for not participating in college life other than distractions in the college were also related to personal choices, not related to athletics, and not dissimilar from non-athletes, which included: wanting independence; individual lifestyle did not agree with many college events which focused on drinking and partying; wanting to live with friend of the opposite sex; reduced cost of living off campus. Reasons for living in the college for four years were: having understanding roommate(s) (frequently non-athletes); and having the ability to study and sleep in a chaotic environment.

5) All students-athletes reported some difficulty scheduling courses because of their athletic participation. These classes included not only schedule conflicts between classes and practice times, but also the limited availability of sections with preferred professors. Some tried to avoid

classes, which met on Fridays. For required courses, which met afternoons during the season, they reported having little problem being excused from practice. They generally accepted limitations in class choices as a sacrifice to participate in athletics.

6) Interaction with faculty was generally positive. Most student-athletes felt that very few professors had negative attitudes toward them because they were athletes, and the numbers of professors, and the less-than-favorable incidences, were relatively rare. Overall they felt professors were understanding of their need to miss classes for athletic events. However, some negative experiences were noted. Hurtful negative remarks made by some faculty included: "Rice should be competing athletically in Division III." Another professor warned on the first day of classes that students should not take the course if they were athletes. Most distressing was the statement by more than one student-athlete that individual professors unfairly treated them because their athletic responsibility required they miss labs or tests. Some faculty members told them that they would not be allowed to make up the missed work. One other student reported that although there were no negative comments in a class, it was perceived athletes were not welcome.

The members of this subcommittee considered all the student-athletes interviewed to be very high quality individuals. They were very intelligent, diligent and sincere during the conversations. Their responses to the sub-committee's questions were believed to be honest, candid expressions of the student-athletes' views.