

Message

From: Paxson, Christina [christina_paxson@brown.edu]
on behalf of Paxson, Christina <christina_paxson@brown.edu> [christina_paxson@brown.edu]
Sent: 1/5/2020 6:39:39 PM
To: Kevin A. Mundt '76 [REDACTED]; Menco, Samuel M. [smenco@mdcp.com]
Subject: comments welcome



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Christina H. Paxson
President
Professor of Economics and Public Policy
Brown University

Committee on Excellence in Athletics

Motivation

Brown University's athletics program currently offers 38 varsity sports and 33 club sports. Each year, this program provides hundreds of Brown students with valuable opportunities to compete and experience all of the developmental benefits that come with athletics participation.

Although the benefits of athletics are clear, the large numbers of varsity sports at Brown present a significant challenge. With a few exceptions, Brown's varsity teams are not as competitive as they could be. In the decade from 2009 to 2018, Brown garnered only 2.8% of Ivy titles, the lowest in the Ivy League. A report conducted in early 2019 by Collegiate Sports Associates emphasizes the link between the large number of teams and the lack of competitiveness, and states that "without careful management and difficult decisions, the context can evolve into comprehensive competitive mediocrity."

Students who come to Brown to compete at the varsity level want to be competitive, and the current underperformance of varsity sports leads to suboptimal student experiences. In addition, varsity teams that aren't competitive are less likely to play a significant community-building role. The numbers and enthusiasm of the students, faculty, staff and alumni who came out for women's soccer this past fall and, a few years ago, for men's lacrosse, demonstrate that athletics has the potential to build community at Brown—provided that teams are competitive.

There are many reasons why Brown teams don't win more often. With financial resources spread across so many sports, team operating budgets are relatively low. This has resulted in low coaching salaries in many (although not all) sports, making it difficult to attract and retain top talent. The large number of sports also places stress on things that are not in team operating budgets: facilities for competition, practice and training; office space for coaches; funds to match competing financial aid offers and financial aid for international student athletes; funds for training and conditioning staff; and administrative time in the athletics department and the admissions office. The lack of adequate facilities is a major impediment, preventing some teams from being able to host competitions at Brown.

One of the most limited resources in athletics, which is not financial, is the number of admissions recruiting slots. Over the past 7 years, the number of slots has been increased from 205 to 230, and the ratio of slots to the size of the undergraduate student body is on the high side among our peers. Even so, with 38 varsity sports, not all teams have enough recruiting slots to fill their rosters. Teams that must rely on walk-ons are placed at a significant disadvantage.

Brown athletics should not be allowed to "evolve into comprehensive competitive mediocrity." It is time to make hard choices, by taking a comprehensive look at our menu of varsity and club teams, and examining whether a re-designation of some varsity teams to club and (possibly) some club teams to varsity would, in the long run, be better for our students and for Brown.

Committee charge:

Develop a proposal to rationalize the numbers and identities of varsity and club sports at Brown, with the goal of enhancing the experience of students who participate in both varsity and club sports; increasing competitiveness in varsity athletics; and building a stronger university community.

Specifically, the committee will assess existing varsity and club sports with respect to the criteria outlined below, and make recommendations about which sports should take on club or varsity status. The goal should be to reduce the overall number of varsity sports to no more than 25 (although I will be glad to see a report that offers options with numbers that range from 23 to 27.)

Primary criteria for evaluating whether a sport should have varsity status:

1. Does Brown have a track record of competitiveness in the sport? Are there reasons to think (based on current coaching staff or other special factors) that the sport could become competitive with reasonable increases in resources (financial and/or recruiting slots)?
2. Does Brown have adequate facilities for the sport? For example, are there places for practice and competition on or close to campus, and are Brown's facilities adequate to host competitions and tournaments? What resources would be needed to bring facilities up to standards, and is it realistic that funds for this purpose could be raised?
3. Does the sport have the potential to build community? For example, at colleges and universities with successful programs, does the sport attract a large fan base?

[Note that I am not including, as a criteria, the fraction of the sport's operating budget that is endowed. As discussed above, the team operating budget is only one of the factors that influences success. The endowment of any varsity team that is switched to club status would go to support the club sport.]

Finally, any plan must be compliant with the Title IX standards specified in Brown's consent decree. Basically, if Brown eliminates any women's varsity sports, the percentage of each gender participating in the program will have to be within 2.25% of each gender's participation in the undergraduate enrollment for the same academic year. This would be reduction from the current threshold of 3.50%.

Committee meetings and timeline

The committee will meet monthly (by Webex or in person) between March 2020 and June 2020. Briefing materials will be prepared prior to each meeting.

A tentative agenda is as follows:

March 2020:

- Overview of the competitiveness of each of Brown's varsity and (more competitive) club teams
- Briefing on Title IX
- Discussion of current and optimal roster sizes, and the allocation of recruiting slots

April 2020:

- Assessment of the adequacy of facilities for each sport
- Review of the operating budget for each sport
- Assessment of the current capacity of shared resources, like strength and conditioning, and training

May 2020:

- Interactive analysis of implications of different choices for recruiting slots, AI averages, and gender equity. Ideally all members will attend in person.

June 2020:

- Discussion of and vote on final recommendations

Over the summer, the Athletics Department and the University will develop communications plans for students, parents, coaches, and alumni, and transition plans for coaches. The goal would be to announce changes in early fall, before seniors have made commitments to Brown, and allowing time for the University to counsel and assist students who want to transfer.

Confidentiality

This committee will work in complete confidentiality. Members will refrain from sharing any committee materials or the committee's deliberations.

Committee membership (tentative)

- Kevin Mundt, chair
- George Barrett
- Rich Caputo
- Kathryn Quadracci Flores
- Eileen Goldgeier
- Jim Kim
- Paula McNamara

The committee will be staffed by the senior members of the Athletics Department (Jack Hayes, Colin Sullivan, Jeanne Carhart and Carolan Norris)