

Athletics Committee of the Board of Trustees

October, 2016

Submitted by Rick Eckstein, Dept. of Sociology and Criminology

The Athletics Committee met on Oct. 10, 2016. The other faculty representative on the committee, Gay Strickler, was unable to attend. These committee meetings are generally designed to bring trustees up to speed on what is going on in the world of VU athletics. Most of this information is already available to the faculty through a variety of channels. Occasionally, though, the trustees entertain larger philosophical and organizational issues. For instance, a few years ago the committee examined the long-term sustainability of our current varsity sports program and kicked around options for redesigning this program (see report from 10/2013). This conversation was driven by the long-repressed realization that the overall “arms race” within intercollegiate athletics (nationwide) is starting to irreparably strain university budgets. Spending on athletics, as a percentage of school budgets, is increasing faster than any other sector. This is true at almost all colleges regardless of size, shape, and location. Financial burdens are especially challenging at expensive private schools such as Villanova that do not receive public subsidies, have relatively large varsity programs, and do not have income streams from big-time football.

Based on some things mentioned in last week’s meeting, it is possible that the Athletics Committee will once again start discussing this issue. If so, the faculty should have something akin to a coherent position so that Gay and I (and our successors) can confidently say, “Villanova faculty believe XYZ” rather than, “Rick and Gay think XYZ.” It is also conceivable that the faculty can proactively raise this issue of unsustainability since it has wide-ranging ramifications on the university’s core educational mission. But it would be better having some kind of “mandate” before doing that.

Currently, Villanova spends about \$40 million per year on varsity athletics. This does not include indirect costs such as academic support, maintenance, overhead, and depreciation. That is about 10% of the school’s overall operating budget. Only about ¼ of those expenses are covered by athletics-based revenues. Even winning the 2016 national basketball championship generated only about \$5.5 million in NCAA “givebacks.” Expenses on varsity athletics have increased (on average) 8% a year between 2003 and today. Overall spending on athletics has more than doubled during that period. Athletic-based revenue has not doubled during that period so a larger share of these expenses has been covered by general operating resources and student fees.

Clearly, university spending on core academic needs has not doubled during this same period. The library budget has not increased 8% a year. We do not dedicate 8% more every year to upgrade and renovate the challenging learning conditions in Tolentine and Chemical Engineering, or the antiquated infrastructure of Mendel. While these patterns are part of a national trend, it doesn’t mean that individual schools have to go along with it, difficult though it might be to challenge the status quo and, perhaps, even ignite change in higher education.

And so, disguised in this official report from the Board of Trustees Athletics Committee, is a respectful suggestion that Villanova’s faculty start seriously discussing the financial and moral

relationship between intercollegiate athletics and the university's educational mission, especially in light of our reclassification as an R3 university. Perhaps the Faculty Congress can direct the Athletic Advisory Committee (see separate report) to explore this further.
