

Minutes of the Meeting of the Faculty Board on Athletics
March 21, 2025
500 Main Building, 11:00am

Members Present: Patricia Bellia (Chair), Colin Barr, Pete Bevacqua, Annie Coleman, Ann-Marie Conrado, Darren Davis, Ann Firth, Pat Holmes, Randy Kozel, Mike Niemier, Cara Ocobock, Rev. Gerry Olinger, C.S.C., Annie Wiese, Katie Wowak

Members Excused: Umesh Garg

Athletics Liaisons: Missy Conboy (Policy/Legal), Heidi Uebelhor (Compliance), Jen Vining-Smith (GLD Center), Jacob Simonis (Compliance)

Guests: N/A

1. Opening Prayer

Professor Bellia called the meeting to order and invited Professor Kozel to offer the opening prayer.

2. Minutes

The Board unanimously approved the minutes of February 21, 2025.

3. Academic Reports

Grade Report: Mr. Holmes presented the Fall 2024 Team GPA Summary report. In comparing the Fall 2024 grade summary to the previous fall, he stated the numbers have been consistently solid. In the most recent iteration, the average semester GPA for all student-athletes was 3.370. All of the teams had semester GPAs over 3.000, and seven teams had GPAs over 3.500. Regarding the relatively recent change in Notre Dame's Undergraduate Academic Code and the addition of the "Academic Warning" status, he noted that during the last three fall semesters, only two student-athletes have gone on probation (averaging fewer than one each semester). The prior six falls, on average there were nine students on academic probation. This institutional policy adjustment has improved and will continue to improve the University's Academic Progress Rate (APR), the NCAA metric that tracks eligibility and retention of grant-in-aid (GIA) student-athletes.

Mr. Holmes referenced the back page of the report, sharing that it provides information on the grade comparisons for student-athletes, GIA student-athletes, and all students. Overall, the numbers show that there is a good culture here, as well as a collaborative effort from recruiting, admissions, academic support, and other areas of the University to help student-athletes successfully pursue an education from the University.

With regard to undergraduate majors, Mr. Holmes shared that student-athletes are overrepresented in the College of Business, on target with the student body in Arts and Letters, and underrepresented in the Colleges of Science and Engineering.

Graduation Rates: Mr. Holmes defined both the Federal Graduation Rate (Fed Rate), which examines whether students who enroll in the fall of their freshman year graduate from that same institution within six years, and the Graduation Success Rate (GSR), which removes from the calculation those students in good academic standing should they leave the university before graduating.

In the GSR, Notre Dame had a 99% success rate, which is the best in the country. Of the 360 Division 1 institutions, only five had a 99% rate (Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Santa Clara, and Notre Dame). Of the 134 schools in the FBS category, Notre Dame was the only school with a 99% grad rate.

Looking ahead, Mr. Holmes reported that we need to be aggressive with those who leave early for the pros, given how that group will negatively affect our Fed Rate if they do not complete their degrees within six years. He shared that Notre Dame had 13 student-athletes from the 2017 cohort who left early. All of these students were in good academic standing, but their departure negatively impacted our Federal Rate. Conversely, these departures did not result in a GSR hit. Mr. Holmes does not believe the Fed Rate will go away, but because of the changing nature of college athletics, and the frequency with which student-athletes are transferring, he believes there will be a greater focus on the APR and the tracking of student-athlete retention. From a broader University perspective, however, we also need to be concerned about our university Fed Rate, which these early departures will affect.

Professor Ocobock asked whether student-athletes who leave for the pros affect our GSR. Mr. Holmes indicated that these individuals are removed from the cohort and do not affect GSR numbers if they students leave in good academic standing. That said, they do continue to negatively affect our Fed Rate. Professor Bellia shared that she and Mr. Holmes, along with other campus partners, have worked to help those who left for professional opportunities find ways to come back and earn their degrees within six years.

Professor Davis asked about structural impediments that affect the ability for student-athletes to return and complete their degrees. Mr. Holmes noted that baseball players often put something in their professional contracts that allows them to return to school and get their degrees paid for by their professional team. Also, the NFL, after a player's first year in the league, provides \$20K a year for a player to use for education. There is also access to some NCAA funding to supplement this support. Mr. Holmes noted that hockey is more challenging because contracts often do not address this type of educational. Mr. Bevacqua said that all of this may change with congressional action. Coming off the *House* settlement, there may be a requirement that institutions maintain a lifetime commitment to providing scholarship aid for degree completion. Mr. Holmes also noted that in the past, Notre Dame has picked up the education bill for former hockey student-athletes to finish their degrees.

Professor Coleman asked whether Fighting Irish Media could tell more stories of our student-athletes as students. She didn't feel that the stories she had seen were typically highlighting their academic stories. Mr. Bevacqua shared that we do try to tell these stories to a certain extent, and agreed this is an important perspective to provide. He mentioned the recent pieces on the game versus Georgia, and the Jadin O'Brien piece as examples. Professor Bellia noted that the Here Come the Irish series on Peacock was very well done and included a focus on academics.

Mr. Holmes referenced another attachment, which listed the teams in the CFP. In short, he reviewed the top 25 teams for their athletic and academic accomplishments, detailing their performance in the AP Poll, the Fed Rate, the GSR, and the APR. He then ranked each program using their performance in each category and averaged out the rankings. Notre Dame had the best average. In his opinion, the chart demonstrates that Notre Dame offers the best of both worlds: a world-class education paired with a championship culture. Professor Bellia complimented the work of this ASSA, but Mr. Holmes stated that this success does not happen without buy-in from all parties.

Professor Conrado inquired further about the Fed Rate, asking if those schools with better athletes were more at risk of being negatively affected. Mr. Holmes shared that when student-athletes leave, for any reason, the Fed Rate will be negatively affected. He noted, however, that if an institution brings students in at mid-year (which is common in stronger football programs), they do not count in the Fed Rate, as the Fed Rate only considers fall enrollees. Mr. Bevacqua reiterated when student-athletes transfer, even if they subsequently graduate from the second school, the original school takes a hit.

4. Working Group on Student-Athlete Integration (Ann Firth/Tricia Bellia)

Professor Bellia introduced the topic of the integration of our student-athletes into the rest University community. The University commits to the holistic development of all students, and the time commitments of student-athletes raise special concerns. Father John had been concerned about the impact of name, image, and likeness money on student-athlete integration, and created the Working Group on Student-Athlete Integration to consider three areas: 1) the newly proposed training table facility, 2) residence hall environments, and 3) mid-year enrollment. Prof. Bellia noted that the Student Welfare Subcommittee also gathered to discuss these topics, and the attached report of the Working Group reflects their input.

Father Olinger weighed in on residential life, sharing that he wants to make sure all students have that important point of connection to the University. Moving forward, the placement of student-athletes in the residence halls will include, whenever possible, keeping two first-year members of a team in the same hall. These students will not be in the same room or even on the same floor, but they will share the same hall. The Working Group is also contemplating focus groups and surveys, to get a better sense of how this approach is working. Father Olinger also noted the "ghosting factor," involving not only some student-athletes but also international and wealthier students, and the impact this practice continues to have on the residence hall environment. Ms. Firth added that the integration of student-athletes into the residence hall environment does set us apart, and the work of the Working Group allows us to continue with same kind of intentionality. That work will help us think about how both the

House settlement and the opening of the new training table facility might affect integration. Professor Bellia suggested that everyone look at the future direction section of the report, which envisions a continuing role for the Faculty Board on Athletics (likely to fall to the Student Welfare Subcommittee). Student-athlete surveys and senior surveys will continue to be an important tool in assessing the situation. Regarding training table, Professor Bellia noted that there is a lot going on with the planning. Ron Powlus, Deputy Athletics Director for Football Operations, will come before the Board at some point this semester to share how the planning for that facility is progressing.

Mr. Bevacqua added that one of the first things the Working Group agreed on is that integration is a two-way street, and he noted that many student-athletes feel ostracized on the academic side of campus. He also pointed out that the group's discussions were very positive because those discussions focused on what it means to be a student-athlete today, not 30 years ago.

Professor Conrado shared that she was surprised, upon reviewing the report, by the lack of data on "ghosting." Her own experience from teaching student-athletes, including with design projects involving students sharing their residential surroundings, had led her believe to that there was an exception that allowed student-athletes to live off campus. Father Gerry pointed out that there had been Covid exceptions, which had had some lasting impact and which might contribute to this impression.

Ms. Wiese noted that there are some easy changes that could improve student-athletes' experience in the residence halls. She shared that when she was a student-athlete, she lived right across from RA on the floor. The RA would host a social event at 10 pm at night, and the noise issue presented a conflict with her early morning practice. Ms. Wiese stated that while she loved the dorm and the easy access it provided to the pool and dining hall, there were little things that could be addressed, such as placing student-athletes away from social spaces, to make it a better environment for student-athletes.

Mr. Bevacqua shared that rest and air conditioning are key factors for our student-athletes. Professor Bellia noted that she looked forward to seeing more information on the results of the intentional placement of student-athletes this year. In addition, Professor Bellia observed that a student-athlete's first impression of the residence hall experience is very important, and the Summer Bridge experience is a key factor in making that first impression positive. Father Olinger indicated that the Division of Student Affairs is trying to make the summer experience in the dorms more like what students can expect in the regular academic year.

Finally, Mr. Bevacqua shared that should the *House* settlement go through, there could be 55-60 student-athletes who will lose roster spots. We need to keep them in mind, and he noted the importance of partnering with the residence halls to support the students who will need to navigate this change.

5. Report of the Academic Integrity Subcommittee

Professor Kozel shared with the full Board the proposed amendment to the FBA Excused Absence Policy. Professor Kozel spoke to the existing policy for excused absences for

intercollegiate athletics competition. He indicated that there are fewer standards for individual student-athletes competing in other events (e.g., national team competition, media days, etc.). As a result, the Academic Integrity Subcommittee considered a proposal that provides a more structured approach these additional requests while retaining some discretion. Professor Bellia thanked Professor Kozel for the work of the group, and stated that part of this approach is recognizing that our student-athletes have athletic goals that go beyond the Notre Dame team on which they are participating. (She shared the example of Jadin O'Brien training for a spot on the Olympic team.) The proposal reflects a fair amount of common law codification, including importing the current treatment of national team competition during final exams. It envisions a role for a head coach in weighing in on the importance of the competitive event, as well as a role for ASSA in identifying any academic concerns or risks.

Discussion of the proposal ensued. Professor Barr shared that student-athletes are sometimes at a disadvantage, given that other students may not need third party approval for their outside activities. Ms. Firth wondered whether there might be situations when the head coach (of the affected sport) might not support an exception, leaving a student with no ability to pursue the opportunity without incurring unexcused absences. Professor Bellia shared that while coaches might be frustrated by losing key players for a portion of the season, in her experience they typically support the request if it is in the best competitive interest of the student-athlete.

After discussion, the Board adjusted the language to involve a sport administrator in the process, to ensure that head coach involvement in the exception request would not unfairly cut off an opportunity for a student-athlete.

Professor Coleman then asked about NIL opportunities that might require class misses. Professor Bellia weighed in on this possibility, and shared that this policy is looking to help student-athletes to enhance their reputation athletically. The FBA is not seeking to expand this exception to include NIL opportunities. There was some follow up discussion of whether competition exceptions would be available during Summer Bridge, given that there have been some issues with baseball and hockey showcases. Professor Bellia confirmed that Summer Bridge formed part of the impetus for codifying this policy. Given the compressed timeframe for Summer Bridge, absences would be limited to two days.

The Board adopted the policy as amended to include sport administrator involvement. (The amended version is attached as an appendix to these minutes.)

6. Report on the Revised Statement of Principles on Intercollegiate Athletics:

Professor Bellia shared that the Statement of Principles on Intercollegiate Athletics had been updated during the break between semesters, as part of the communications project the Board discussed at the last meeting. In the review, there was an effort to minimize changes at this time. She summarized the main changes, including the new language in the first paragraph that shares the vision for why we engage in intercollegiate athletics. In the second paragraph, the language emphasizes that we will not lose our "north star" and that we will do things the Notre Dame way.

In response to a question from Professor Coleman, Professor Bellia indicated that she would circulate a redlined version of the Statement.

7. Chair's Announcements

Professor Bellia announced schedule approvals as follows:

2024-25 New schedule approvals

- Volleyball spring schedule: *Approved - 2/24*
- Men's Soccer spring schedule: *Approved - 2/25*
- Women's Soccer spring schedule: *Approved - 2/25*
- Outdoor Track: *Approved 3/17*

2024-2025 Schedule changes:

- Women's Tennis: Match on 3/2 cancelled. *Approved 2/19*
- Men's Golf: Request to miss class on 4/7 to participate in the Practice Round of The Masters Golf Tournament. *Approved 2/22*
- Rowing: Request to add scrimmage vs. Navy on 3/11. No class misses. *Approved 3/4*

2024-25 Schedule Changes (Weather)

- Baseball: Team missed class on 3/17 due to inclement weather affecting return travel. *Approved 3/17*
- Women's Tennis: Team missed class on 3/17 (through 12:20pm) due to travel/weather delay. *Approved 3/17*

Post-Season (ACC, Big Ten, NCAA)

- Men's/Women's Indoor Track: Request to be excused from classes on 2/28 and 3/3 for ACC Championship travel. *Approved 2/18*
- Men's and Women's Indoor Track: Requested early departure for 7 student-athletes to attend practice for Indoor ACC Championship: *Approved 2/26*
- ACC Women's Basketball Tournament: *Approved 3/3*
- Big Ten Hockey Tournament: Class miss request for 3/6 and 3/7 to compete in Minnesota in Big Ten Hockey Tournament. *Approved 3/4*
- Women's Basketball: Requested a 3/20 class miss (for classes after 10:45 am) to participate in NCAA postseason assigned practice/media session. *Approved 3/17*
- Women's Basketball: Requested a 3/21 class miss (after 9:15 am) for an NCAA home tournament game. *Approved 3/17*
- Cheer: Requested a 3/21 miss (after 11:20am) for a Women's Basketball tournament home game: *Approved 3/18*

8. Adjournment

Professor Bellia adjourned the meeting at 12:29 pm.

Appendix to 3/21/2025 Minutes

Each head coach prepares the team's schedule for competition in conjunction with the departmental administrator responsible for that program and with the department's facilities manager. No such schedule becomes final until both the director of athletics and the Faculty Board on Athletics have approved it. The board has authorized its chair to approve on its behalf any schedule falling clearly within board guidelines. The chair shall report the disposition of any scheduling request, including how any approved schedule complies with the requirements and limitations below, to the board for inclusion in the board's official minutes.

The playing schedules for all varsity sports must be constructed so that student-athletes do not miss more than three classes in the Monday-Wednesday-Friday sequence or three classes in the Tuesday-Thursday sequence in a single semester. This prescription applies to regular-season play, not to post-season conference or NCAA tournaments. Given special circumstances consistent with the board's desire to enable coaches to build competitive schedules, the board gives its chair the discretion to approve up to two additional class misses for a given semester before having to bring a specific request before the board. The board has given its chair the discretion to authorize additional class-miss excuses when reasonable due to weather, transportation, or other complications unanticipated when the team's travel schedule was originally approved.

A head coach or sport administrator, in consultation with the Director of Athletics and the Director of Academic Services for Student-Athletes (or their designees), may seek additional excused absences on behalf of individual student-athletes. Covered events include events in which student-athletes represent Notre Dame at invitational events or continued individual play at a competition; events in which student-athletes represent Notre Dame other than in competition (e.g., media days); or events in which student-athletes engage in high-level competition with a significant potential impact on the student-athlete's personal, athletic, and/or professional development (e.g., national team tryouts or competition or professional opportunities). Head coaches and student-athletes will identify potential covered events as soon as possible to enable the student-athlete, ASSA personnel, and/or the chair of the board to consult as appropriate with the student's dean (or dean's designee) or instructors to ensure that the projected additional absences are not inconsistent with the learning objectives of particular courses.

In weighing whether to authorize the event for an excused absence, the board will consider:

- the potential academic impact of the event, including the student's past performance, the overall number of absences already anticipated in the student's schedule, the anticipated length of the absence, any academic risk factors;
- the nature of the event, including the likelihood that the student's participation will lead to qualification for future elite competition, and whether the student can achieve that qualification through alternative events presenting fewer academic conflicts.

The chair of the board is authorized to approve requests for additional excused absences that clearly fall within existing precedents and shall report the disposition of all such requests to the board.

Deleted: On a case-by-case basis, the vice president for student affairs, the director of academic services for student athletes, and the chair of the board may approve additional absences for an individual player who qualifies for invitational events or continued play at a competition.